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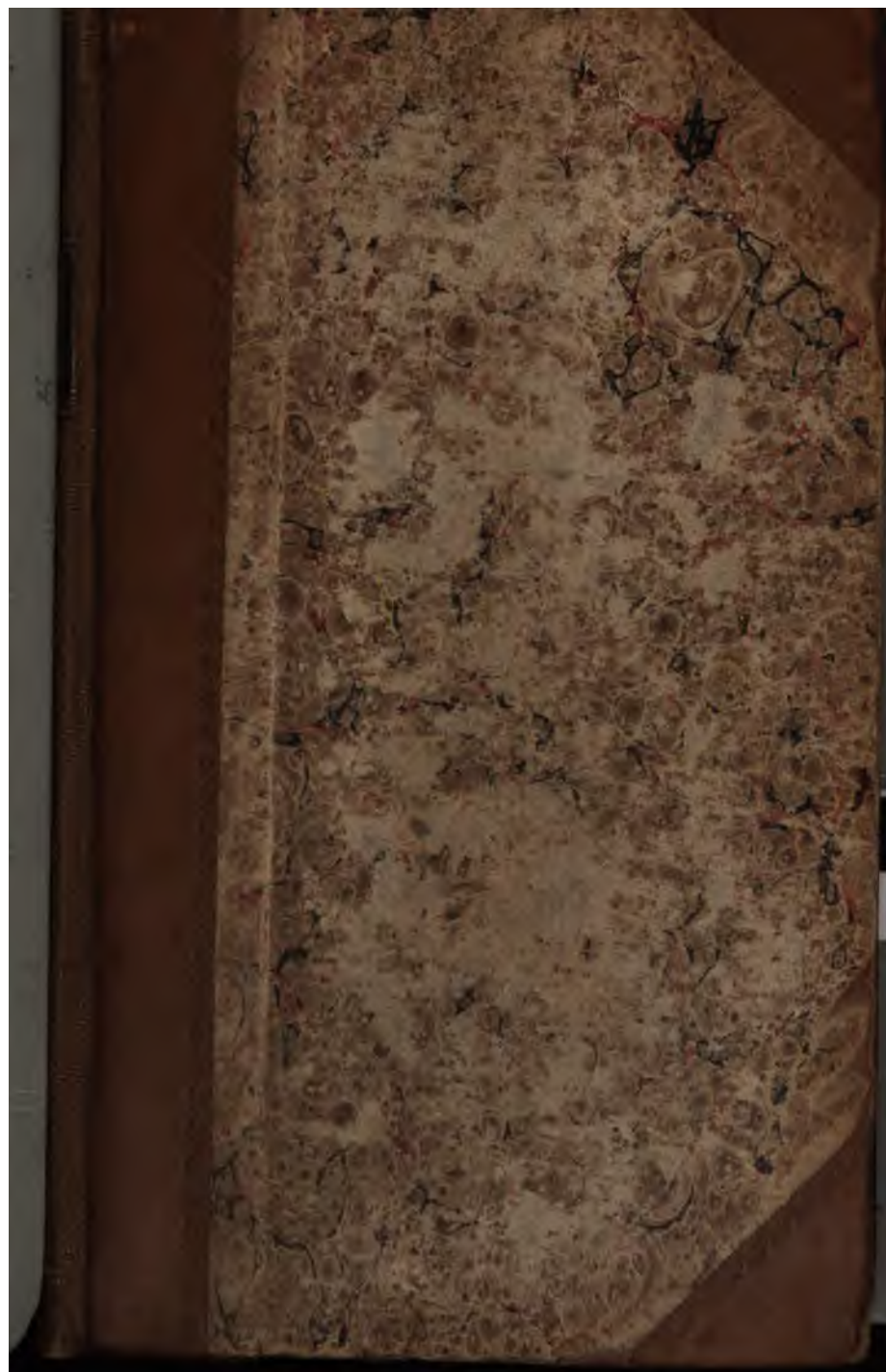
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## **PAROCHIAL SERMONS.**

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*v. 54. 1828.*  
**PAROCHIAL SERMONS**

**ILLUSTRATIVE OF**  
**THE IMPORTANCE**  
**OF THE**  
**REVELATION OF GOD**  
**IN**  
**JESUS CHRIST.**

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**BY THE REVEREND**  
**RENN D. HAMPDEN, M.A.**  
**LATE FELLOW OF ORIEL COLLEGE, OXFORD.**

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THE RIGHT REVEREND  
EDWARD COPLESTON, D.D.

LORD BISHOP OF LLANDAFF,  
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MY LORD,

WHEN I solicited the honour of dedicating this Volume to Your Lordship, it was simply with the wish of publicly testifying that affectionate respect towards Your Lordship, which I have long felt, and cannot but be proud to acknowledge.

The interval which has elapsed since my request, has given me occasion to perform, at the same time, the welcome duty of congratulation on Your Lordship's promotion to a high station in the Church,—an honour, which, I am sure, has only followed in the track of the opinions and wishes of the wise and learned; and in which the Church especially must rejoice. For my part, I ought not, perhaps, to presume to add my humble voice to the general approbation attendant on Your Lordship's preferment: but, when my connexion with that Society, which claims you peculiarly as its own, is considered, I trust, I shall be pardoned for expressing my feeling of sincere joy at an event in which I



may naturally be supposed to take a lively concern.

I have to thank Your Lordship for the confidence placed in me by the kind permission to publish this work under the sanction of your high name: and, with earnest prayer for your support and comfort in the discharge of those duties to which the Providence of God has now called you,

I remain, My Lord,

Your Lordship's obliged.

and faithful Servant,

RENN D. HAMPDEN.

4, Upper Seymour Street,

Jan. 21, 1828.



## PREFACE.

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IT has been the endeavour of the Author, throughout the following Sermons, to represent the Revelation of God in Jesus Christ, in its real importance, as a Rule of Life.—Expositions of Scriptural Truth labour under this disadvantage:—that they are obliged to express in separate parts, what, in fact, does not exist but as a whole. Whilst we set forth those views of the Divine Being, and of ourselves, which the Scriptures reveal to us, and insist on the necessity of rightly receiving them as they are developed in the Scriptures,—we appear to detach

Christian sentiments from Christian actions. On the other hand, when we describe the disciple performing those actions of holiness which belong to his profession, and insist, also, on the indispensable necessity of these in order to salvation,—we appear to detach the actions from the faith of the Gospel. Hence we find some preachers, whilst they enlarge on faith as the characteristic of a Christian calling, guarding their assertions against the imputation of neglecting to enforce practical holiness:—and others again, who are diffuse in exhorting their brethren to the works of Christianity, anxiously deprecating the injurious construction, that they underrate the justifying nature of faith. But the inconvenience is only that which arises from the very nature of a description. It is impossible to repre-

present in words any real object, except by successive delineations: and thus, what when seen in itself appears at once in all its proportions as a whole, is severed into distinct portions, and admits of different constructions, according to the point of view which most forcibly strikes the attention of the describer or the hearer, or which is the first or the last impression received from the description. Thus; Christian faith and Christian holiness are, in reality, but one and the same thing. They *exist* only as they are embodied and exemplified in the life of the Christian man. But in description they become different views of the individual in whom they are embodied. And, hence, they come, not only to be regarded sometimes as separate qualities of a Christian profession, but to be separately

insisted on in such a way, as in turn to throw each other into shade.

To counteract this delusion has been the anxious aim of the Author. He has tried to lead his readers from abstract notions on the subject of their religion; and to shew them its speculative truth and beauty as these are reflected from its practical importance. The best way, as it appears to him, of preventing the unnatural disunion of Christian faith and morals, and exhibiting them in their proper identity with each other, as they are seen *in fact*,—is; to treat them, in *discussion*, as far as possible, as *one thing*: not to be afraid of misconstruction from the use of controverted terms; but, rather, boldly to use such terms in their right comprehensive sense whenever it can be done. For the

preacher then gives the impression to his hearers, that he is presenting to them different *views only* of the *same* Christian character, or different *evidences* of the kingdom of God established in the heart of the living Christian; and not parts of a Christian profession capable of existing in disunion. Whether he dwells on faith, or repentance, or works, it is to "Christ crucified," and "raised from the dead," that he is found endeavouring to *conform* his hearers.

This, it may be observed, is the method by which our religion is inculcated on us in the Scriptures themselves. They imply an understanding on our part, that it is *a life* to which they refer in addressing their instructions to us. Thus they speak indistinctly of the belief and the works

of the disciple; as appears very pointedly in that answer of our Saviour, related by Saint John (vi. 29); “this is the *work* of God, that ye *believe* on him whom he hath sent.”

Nothing, indeed, could more effectually convince Christian hearers of the fatality of many of the controversies which have been raised on points of our religion, than this constant reference of Christian doctrines to the life of the disciple. Let them habitually contemplate the doctrines there, where each proclaims the truth of the other; and it will surely be found, that the apparent inconsistencies, or paradoxes, (as they have been called,) of Christianity, exist only in *disputation*: whereas, if the disciple once begins to act steadily on what he is taught—if he only *lives*



Christianity;—the perfect harmony of the several truths clearly appears—where alone it can be discernible by human capacities—in that system of human conduct which is their combined expression.

The Sermons are so arranged, that they may either be read separately, or united in a systematic view. In the latter case, it will be perceived, that the first twelve Sermons are employed in illustrating the importance of those relations in which we stand towards God by the revelation of his Son Jesus Christ:—and the last eight in pointing out and enforcing some leading views of our condition in the world; as it appears to us under the light of that Revelation. The former part exhibits the Christian as he forgets himself, and lives out of the world to

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# SERMONS.

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## SERMON I.

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THE GOSPEL A SAVOUR OF LIFE AND DEATH.

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2 cor. ii. 15, 16.

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life.

**SAINT PAUL** is here speaking of his ministerial office in terms appropriate to a sacrifice. It was a current notion in ancient times, that, when an animal was offered in sacrifice, the savour which rose to heaven, while the victim was consumed by the flames of the altar, was inhaled as it were by the Deity, to whom it was offered up. And the ac-

ceptableness of the offering so made, was represented by the notion of the Deity taking delight in the odour of the sacrifice. Saint Paul, accordingly, knowing with what faithful and ardent zeal he had served his Lord in his appointed task of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, describes his ministry as a sacrifice which was acceptable to God. His exertions in spreading the knowledge of salvation through Christ had been so far triumphant, that God deigned to regard them as “a sweet smelling savour” which had risen up from the altar of piety to the throne of grace.

But this expression which Saint Paul applies to the Apostolical ministry of the Gospel, is no less true when applied also to the preaching of the Gospel by the ministers of the Church at the present day. They have not, indeed, the means of accompanying their preaching with *power*,—they cannot know, as Saint Paul did<sup>a</sup>, by

<sup>a</sup> See the verse preceding the text—also 2 Cor. i. 21, 22.; 1 Cor. xv. 10.; i. 4—9.; Col. i.; Phil. i.; 1 Thess. i. ii.; 2 Thess. i.; 2 Tim. iv. 7. 8. 17.

an immediate communication from heaven, that their ministry is crowned with success,—but still they have a dispensation of the Gospel committed unto them; and the word which they declare is equally the appointed message of the same Lord, who made Saint Paul the Apostle of the Gentiles, and enabled him mightily to convince men of the truth.

Of the preaching of the Gospel, therefore, at the present day, we may say no less, that it is unto God the “sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved, and in them that perish;”—“to the one,” that it is “the savour of death unto death”—“to the other,” that it is “the savour of life unto life.”

The general truth accordingly inculcated on us by this passage of Scripture, is, that all whom the glad tidings of Christianity have reached, are placed in a state of trial with regard to it—they *may* accept it, or they *may* reject it—but they cannot dispense with the awful responsibility which attaches to them, when once they have had

it made known to them. To all such as have heard of it, it must be either one or the other of the alternatives of death and life. Christ has not *in vain* condescended to take upon him our human nature, that he might die for our sins, and teach us the way of truth and life. Now that he has vouchsafed to do so much for us, and fully to provide for our instruction in righteousness, it cannot possibly be a *matter of indifference*, whether we will hearken to him, or not—whether we will embrace his offers of mercy, or refuse to have him for our Lord;—but we must be either insensible to his grace and *die*, or be converted and *live*. This is the vital and important truth which I purpose to expand and enforce upon your attention.

The Gospel then is either a *savour of death unto death* or of *life unto life*. Observe, in the first place, that there is no *middle* course. To those to whom the Gospel is not a savour of *life*, it is a savour of *death*. How little is this fact seriously thought upon! how little at least is its

truth acknowledged by the generality of mankind in their actions? When we look around us and observe the ways of the world, we should hardly suppose that the declaration of Scripture was really true. We see men displaying such complete indifference towards the awful alternatives of life and death—*eternal life*, and *eternal death*. Judging from their actions we might be tempted to imagine, that there was some *safe middle* course, which required neither much thought nor much exertion, along which they might contentedly proceed, without troubling themselves with apprehensions as to the result to which they are tending. They appear to be satisfied that they are right, provided they are not *far* wrong. If their deviation be not strikingly perceptible, they are regardless whether it be a deviation or not. But how mistaken is their presumption, if there is any truth in the Scripture! Those who are not walking in the *only* right way, are altogether in the wrong. If they are not found in the path which leads to life, they are unhappily in

that which leads to death. Let this consideration awaken you to close inquiry respecting yourselves—let it stir you up to examine yourselves whether you have seriously thought upon the alternatives of life and death which the Gospel sets before you, and whether you have so resolutely and faithfully chosen the way of life, as to have avoided the way of death—knowing that the Gospel is to you—to each of you personally and individually—a savour of life unto life, or a savour of death unto death.

It is a savour of life to *them that are saved*. The redemption through the blood of Christ, of which the Gospel informs us, is of universal efficacy. It was mercifully intended by God, that by *it* all men, without exception, should be saved. All men are his children by creation, and so far, therefore, are equally the objects of his solicitude and love. He was not willing that any should perish, and accordingly gave his Son to be offered up as an atonement for the sins of the whole world. The blessed sacrifice then of the Son of God



on the cross, must be regarded as efficacious to the salvation of every man. But while that sacrifice, by its own propitiatory virtue, is equally efficacious to all, it is not on that account equally productive of its precious benefits on all. And in like manner, while the knowledge of this merciful redemption is, as to its own excellence, a great blessing to all to whom it is imparted, yet it does not prove, ultimately, equally a blessing to all who possess it. As those who despise the proffered redemption through Christ, and shew by their impenitent conduct that they count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, cannot be partakers of the redemption, but exclude themselves from the terms of the covenant, so that even mercy is in vain extended towards them,—for, they *will not be saved*—they will not come to Christ that they may have life:—so may the Gospel message be heard in vain;—its words of healing and comfort may yet carry no balm to those who *have ears and hear not*—who hearing will not perceive, nor understand and be converted. It is only

a savour of life to *them that are saved*, that is, to those who believe in it sincerely, adopting it as the rule of their life and the charter of their salvation ; and who therefore will, through the grace of God, *eventually* be saved by it.

That it should be in such persons a savour of life, we can readily conceive. For the words of the Gospel, though they do not operate as a charm on men whether they will receive them or reject them, are yet calculated, by their very nature, to infuse a new life in the heart of those to whom they are acceptable. Consider the effect which the message of pardon has on the criminal lying under the sentence of death by the laws of his country. How reviving to his disconsolate spirit is the hope alone, that such a pardon may be extended to him !—And can you suppose that a pardon from death eternal can be less reviving to the guilty sinner—the prisoner of Satan—fast bound in the chains of sin and misery—and lying in hopeless agony under the just displeasure of his God ? Will not the voice which proclaims, “Be

of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee."—which looses him from his inexorable bonds and sends him forth to life and freedom,—be hailed, with at least equal exultation, by him, who, knowing himself to be a transgressor, and justly involved in the condemnation under which he is suffering—to be utterly unworthy of God's favour; and an outcast therefore from all happiness—is recalled from the depths of despair; and invited to aspire to the joys of heaven? Will he not feel "the hands which hang down" lifted up, and "the feeble knees" strengthened,—and his whole spirit quickened with a life of which it before seemed utterly incapable? To such a person, indeed, the Gospel message must be a savour of life unto life.

To those on the other hand, who have not an heart to feel and appreciate such consolation, that, which to the penitent sinner is life, becomes the savour of death unto death. They are like persons in a diseased state of body, to whom that which is generally wholesome and nutri-

tious, is injurious and destructive. The remedy which gives life and spirit in one case, in another carries poison and death. At the same time the excellence and use of the remedy itself are not disparaged by its unsuccessful application. It is only the fault of the subject on which it is tried, that it proves deleterious and evil. So may the Gospel be a savour of death to the unbeliever, without any disparagement of its life-giving energy, in cases which are favourable for its operation.

Those to whom the Gospel is offered and who reject it, are, in fact, in a much worse state than such as have never heard its glad tidings. The latter only *want* the blessing, but the former pervert it. If God in his wisdom has not chosen to communicate to any nation, or any individual, the knowledge of his saving truth, we are not thereby to conclude, that he does not design that such persons should participate in the benefits of Christ's atonement. The merits of our Saviour, which are our only title to eternal happiness with God, as they cannot be added to, or diminished,

by any exertions on the part of man, so ~~may~~ be equally powerful to the saving of those who have never heard of his name, as well as of those who, having heard, have put their trust in him, and sought access to the Father through his intercession. Whether the knowledge of what he has done in our behalf, is in every case the means by which his vicarious sufferings are rendered effectual, it is impossible for us to decide. In the wisdom of his moral administration God has appointed great varieties of trial to different individuals living under an equal light of the Gospel; and he may likewise have determined to call some finally to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, without having intimated to them, during their sojournment on earth, the title by which they are admitted to the holy inheritance. Means that are indispensable in certain circumstances may not be so in very different circumstances. To the inquiry,—whether ignorant heathens—strangers to the name of Christ—can possibly be saved, when it is by the knowledge of

salvation that the Christian disciple is required to make his calling and election sure,—our Lord, I conceive, would have given a like answer, to that which he gave to a similar irrelevant inquiry, “What is that to thee, *follow thou me?*” or to that which he gave to the inquiry concerning the number that should be saved, “Strive to enter in at the strait gate.” It is our part at any rate to avail ourselves of the means set before us—we are told what the consequences will be if we neglect those means—and *we* are accordingly placed under Christian government. Christian actions must be performed by *us* who are so placed in this peculiar economy of Divine Providence, that Christian rewards may follow, and Christian punishments may be avoided. Those who are not so placed are not under *the same* obligations. To such persons the rewards and punishments of Christianity *may* follow, not to say independently of all conditions, but on conditions peculiar to themselves. Every man will receive according to what he hath, and not according to what he hath not.

It is of those to whom much has been given, that much will be required. Our Lord does not expect to reap where he has not previously sown, nor to bind up the sheaves where he has not first made the blade to spring from the ground, then formed "the ear, and after that the full corn in the ear;" but he does expect, that where his labour has been expended, there he should see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied;—that where he has sent forth his word, and appointed his messengers to explain it and enforce it on the hearts and understandings of men, there believers should be found receiving that word with gladness, and evincing its converting power in their lives. Nor will he suffer that vine to continue in his vineyard, which, when he looked, that it should have brought forth grapes, after all his careful cultivation, brings forth nothing but leaves or only wild grapes, instead of its proper fruits.

In a Christian community, no one, let his advantages be ever so few, can say that

he is ignorant of the message of the Gospel. There is no one in such a country as ours, who can justly urge in extenuation of his ignorance of God and his duty, that he has not heard that God has sent his Son Jesus Christ into the world to redeem us from our sins. A person may be ignorant of the whole extent of the scheme of revelation;—he may not have understanding sufficient, or having understanding, he may not have learning or leisure sufficient, to compare things spiritual with spiritual, and to see the wonderful truths of Christianity in all their force and beauty:—but if he only attends his parish Church, as he is in duty to himself bound to do, and brings with him there a humble and teachable disposition,—without which no one ever learned any truth of religion to any real purpose,—he cannot fail to know, that God has been manifested in Christ, reconciling the world to himself. He then who has only heard this mighty truth of revelation, cannot any longer be regarded as a person ignorant of the Gospel, and living out of the reach of Christianity. Let us suppose



the most extreme case : that he is one who through a great part of his life has kept himself from all the outward ordinances of Christianity, and wilfully slighted all opportunities of informing himself respecting his religion. Can we imagine such a person to be excusable in his ignorance ? Far from it. Even to such a person has God sent the message of the Gospel. For the very knowledge of the fact—that there is such a thing as Christianity professed among us in this country—a fact, which the outward walls of every Church, nay of every place where worshippers of God are gathered together throughout the land, are enough to testify to him—ought to call his attention to the subject of religion. When he knows that the Christian religion is professed among us, it becomes his imperative duty to examine its nature and pretensions as well as he can ; and he is no longer excusable in his ignorance, until he has done his utmost to make himself acquainted with it. If he is able to read, he is bound to search the Scriptures, to see what account they give of the Christian religion. If he

has never learned to read, and therefore cannot go to the Scriptures themselves, he is still bound to come to Church, and hear the instructions and expositions of the ministers of the Gospel. No man in a Christian country, can, with safety to his soul, do less than this. What we cannot help or avoid, God will assuredly in his great mercy overlook and pardon. Neither want of education, nor meanness of understanding, will be weighed in the balance against us; but our means and opportunities, little as they may be, will certainly be taken into account, and will have their proportionate influence on the sentence which will be passed on us at the great day of judgment.

You will perceive, then, how the knowledge of the Gospel may be the savour of death unto death. This will be "the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light." "If I had not come and spoken unto them, (said our Lord,) they *had not had sin*, but *now* they have no cloke" for

<sup>b</sup> John iii. 19.      <sup>c</sup> John xv. 22.

their sin.\* When the light has risen upon us, it argues a strange infatuation in us, to turn from it, or shut our eyes to it. And what can the ground of such infatuation be, but the depravity itself of our nature, which thus spurns from it its best and greatest consolation? Men love darkness rather than light, *because their deeds are evil*. They have no relish for a pure and holy religion, which forbids their own impure and unholy thoughts; and they will not therefore accept a blessing which contains in it, *for them*, a sting. They will not submit to be healed and restored to life, because the process necessary for their recovery requires that they should pluck out their right eye, or cut off their right hand. Their sin is more precious to them than their *life* itself.

Think, then, let me intreat you, how our Lord must be grieved, when he sees those, for whom he not only died as for their brethren in common, but to whom he has expressly revealed this gracious act of his infinite mercy, rendering it in effect invalid

and nugatory, so far as they are concerned in it. How offensive to him must be that savour of death which rises up as an unnatural incense from that very Gospel which was embalmed with his blood! How dreadful, that the voice of glad tidings should in any case be perverted into accents of lamentation, and mourning, and woe!—that the fruits of the Paradise in which he has reinstated us, should be turned in your mouths into ashes and bitterness—that the waters of life, of which he has bidden us drink freely, should carry spiritual famine and pestilence into the constitution which they were designed to renovate—that the greatest blessing which God could have bestowed on man in this world, should become the greatest curse to any individual! Think of your great responsibility in being permitted to enjoy the knowledge of the Divine will. Remember, that as Christians, you have the holiest, the wisest, the most merciful law given to you from God himself, for the direction of your faith and conduct; but take heed that you remember also, that you are in the *worst* situation

• of all men, if this holy, wise, and merciful law does not convert your souls, and make you wise unto salvation <sup>d</sup>.

“Examine yourselves,” therefore, my brethren, “whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.” Consider whether the word preached rises from your hearts as a sweet-smelling savour of life, or is smothered and dies away with you as an offering on unhallowed altars, exhaling only the noxious savour of death, unacceptable and displeasing to the Lord your Saviour. You to whom the word is preached are the called—the elect—the favoured of God. Do your diligence to make this calling and election sure; to establish and confirm this favour unto life everlasting. Impress on yourselves the conviction, that your election and favour from God, in being thus called to the knowledge of the great salvation of the Gospel, are not a mere passive privilege, but a discipline of your character; not a passport, as it were, to the land of rest,

<sup>d</sup> See Tillotson’s Sermon on Phil. iii. 8. the last sentence.

but a guide on your way to that rest and inheritance to which you are called. For, as Moses told the children of Israel, so may the minister of the Gospel, who is, in like manner, appointed to conduct you to a Canaan,—even an heavenly one,—say to you, who enjoy the fulness of the Gospel light,—“For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.”

Deut. xxx. 11—14.

## SERMON II.

### KNOWLEDGE OF GOD THROUGH CHRIST.

JOHN i. 18.

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

Much disservice and dishonour are often done to the cause of Christianity by the injudicious concessions of its friends and disciples. A familiar instance of this appears in the indiscriminate application of the term, religion, to other systems of belief and profession, which are nothing else but the creatures of imposture, or the fantastic corruptions of an original true revelation. The impure orgies of Grecian or Roman superstition,—the ruthless creed of the Brahmin which immolates the widow on the funeral pile of the husband,—and the

licentious reveries of the pretended Prophet of Arabia,—are all alike designated with the holy name of religion ; and are thus placed on a footing of comparison and rivalry with the doctrines of the Bible. To divest, however, these unreal systems of their assumed honour, so fully conceded to them by usage of speech, is now impossible. It only remains for us to counteract the delusion of the common name, by forming to ourselves just notions of what constitutes a *true* religion, as distinguished from other systems which aspire to be considered in the same light, and thus to assure ourselves that the religion of the Bible is *a Religion* in a transcendent and exclusive sense.

Now we may confidently affirm, that no system of faith deserves the name of a religion, which is founded merely on a collection of *opinions*. Such an edifice is built on sand, and not on a rock. It is very possible for any romantic enthusiast to construct imaginary theories concerning the divine nature and operations, and thus



to captivate the fancy and delude the judgment of the unsuspecting votary. But it is not equally possible for such an one to invent real facts,—real occurrences in the Divine dealings towards man; and to found upon these a substantial system of doctrine. It is accordingly only to the claimant of the gift of inspiration, who adduces some *transactions* on the part of the Divine Being, that we need look, in examining whether a system of religion proposed to us, be worthy of our attention or not. Any pretensions, which do not involve in them this essential circumstance, we may at once set aside, as not in the least entitled to our consideration.

Our first inquiry then with respect to the existence of a religion, is—Are there extant any authentic accounts of things done on the part of God in the course of the world? Has he interfered at all in the events of ages past, and are the acts of his interference faithfully reported to us by any authorized historians?

If we set out with this inquiry, what a number of misnamed religions at once fall

to the ground ? And amidst the ruins of imposture, how nobly preeminent stands the simple fabric of Christianity ! Here we have a history of the world as it is God's world—as it came from his hands—as he has established its order—as he placed his creature man in it—as he distributed the families of mankind in its various regions—as he set up the kingdoms of the earth—as he appointed the special instruments, of his grace and mercy on the one hand, or of his wrath and judgment on the other, to execute the purposes of his will. The miracles also by which the truth of the history, as the work of Divine inspiration, is accredited, come into the same account. They enter into the general estimate of events in which the Deity is represented to have been engaged. So that the whole revelation of Christianity is eminently historical in its nature. And the religion accordingly results from a collective survey of the facts which it contains, as presenting various successive indications of the existence of God, his providence, his power, wisdom and goodness. But there is no other religion which advances such pretensions.

There is no other which is so strictly and properly founded on a *revelation* of the Deity. All other systems are but the imaginations of an unauthorized and inventive curiosity. Christianity directs our contemplation to the steps of the Deity, impressed on the world in which we live; and instructs us what God *is*, by what it tells us he has certainly *done* in regard to us.

This character of the Christian Religion is comprehensively touched in the words of our text:—"no man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." No one is able, from actual vision or absolute contemplation of the Deity, as he is in his own nature, to describe to us what he is, or set him forth to us as the direct object of our thoughts; but the Son of God—he who was with the Father from all eternity, and knew all the divine counsel—he it is, who, by coming into the world, and by consummating in his appearance, and by his teaching, all the previous events in the history of Divine

Providence, has "declared," or made known to us the Deity; by the transactions in which he was personally engaged, finally opening to mankind what it was intended that they should know of the nature and counsels of God.

Hence it is that the Christian Religion has been *progressive* in its development. The scheme of it has been gradually unfolded. Abraham saw the day of Christ indeed, but it was at a *distance*. At the time when he lived, much remained to be transacted of God's special interference in the affairs of the world; and consequently a very imperfect evidence of the Divine Being was afforded to him, compared with that, manifested in the fulness of time, when all was "*finished*" which God had in his heart to perform. The same observation applies to the Patriarchs who preceded, or followed, that great Father of the Faithful. They all looked forward to the hope of redemption; but with various degrees of light and knowledge on the subject, according to the period at which they lived. And the voice of prophecy, in like manner,

spoke in more express accents of the things pertaining to God, as the ways of God found their outlet in the course of human events. It gradually told of the light which should lighten the Gentiles, and of the glory which should be to the chosen people; until at length the only-begotten Son came forth from the bosom of the Father, full of grace and truth, and *declared*, or disclosed, the perfect being of God to mankind.

Thus have we, my brethren, arrived at the knowledge of that sacred mystery, which we denote by the comprehensive expression of The Trinity. The doctrine of a Trinity in Unity, is the ineffably sublime result of all that God is related to have done in our behalf, in that narrative of his providences which we call the Bible. It is not a mere dogma, or formal declaration of some opinion concerning God, simply deduced from certain texts of Scripture,—as the adversaries of the faith once delivered to the Saints are apt to assert;—but it is a general *fact*, clearly resulting from

all those manifold occasions on which the Deity is manifested to us as we read the pages of the Bible. We discover it not, in the books of Moses,—or in the Prophets,—or in the Scriptures of the New Testament,—taken by themselves alone, and independently of each other;—but in the *united* views which they present of the Head of the kingdom of providence. Now, indeed, that we enjoy the full light, we can trace, with more or less clearness, in each separate portion of Scripture, intimations of the doctrine of the Trinity;—nay, even under the very terms by which the Deity is announced to us in the first chapter of Genesis, those who are acquainted with the original language of the Old Testament, detect striking evidences of the sacred truth:—and, perhaps, no Christian reads the words—“*Let us make man in our image, after our likeness*”—but recognizes in this form of expression the existence of a plurality of persons in the Godhead.—Accordingly, to enable the believer to perceive that Scripture truth is one and the same throughout, the Church

calls our attention to the opening of the scheme of Revelation, by appointing the first and eighteenth chapters of Genesis to be read in the services of the festival set apart in commemoration of the mystery of the Trinity.—But it is *because* we enjoy the full light, and reflect back on the past the rays emitted from the later dispensations of God, that we see these evidences of him in the first revelations. To us, the Prophets of the Old Covenant, speak the message of Apostles and Evangelists, because we have learned their words in the school of Apostles and Evangelists. This indeed, is a consideration which must be ever borne in mind, when we bring any particular passage of the older Scriptures in testimony of the doctrine of the Trinity—that we do not rest, or found, the doctrine upon this or that passage;—but that we adduce it only in confirmation of a truth which results from the whole tenour of Scripture—from taking a collective survey of the successive dispensations therein recorded,—from viewing God, not only as the

Creator and Governor of the world,—but also, as our Saviour in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ,—and our Comforter and Sanctifier in the person of the Holy Ghost.

This is the firm and impregnable ground on which Christians should maintain the scriptural truth of a Trinity in Unity. They should never suffer themselves to be entangled in mere verbal controversy with the heretical opposers of this doctrine. The clearest intellect as well as the soundest faith, may be sometimes embarrassed by verbal difficulties—by objections to particular passages—by ingenious interpretations of particular texts, emptying them of that glory which they possess as vehicles of the doctrine of the Trinity: but there is no disturbing the faith or the sense of that Christian, who points to the Bible as a *whole*, containing this doctrine in it as a *matter of fact*—as a truth *identified with*, and *inseparable from*, the *events* which it records. Let it be conceded, for argument's sake, (for it is



what the sound critic of Scripture-language will by no means concede,) but let it be conceded, that certain texts which appear to us plainly to speak of a Trinity, *may* admit of a different interpretation;—still, shall we admit the force of mere critical ingenuity to destroy the plain and indisputable evidence of facts? Shall we suffer ourselves to be compelled to deny a conviction, resulting from what God is related by the sacred historians to have done in the administration of the affairs of the world,—because a dexterous interpreter may avail himself of the ambiguities of language, to weaken the application of certain passages to the point in question? Be it your answer, on the contrary, to all such captious disputants—whose words might otherwise eat as a canker, and carry rottenness and pollution into the very heart of your faith; ‘God who spake “in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son”—we confess that no man hath seen God at any time—we cannot tell, we cannot so much as *think*, what he is in himself—

we profess therefore no mere speculative *opinions* concerning him—we are content to observe and learn what indications ~~he~~ has made of himself in the various dispensations, under which he spoke, to the primitive fathers by the prophets, and to the later ages by his Son. From these facts, therefore, reaching from the foundation of the world, and completed by the declaration of him in his only begotten Son, ~~we~~ *know* assuredly, that we are bound to feel the same religious regards towards the sacred person who redeemed us, and towards him who enlightens and sanctifies the heart, which we feel towards him who is the Father and Governor of all things; and yet that we are not to worship the Holy Three, as if they were three Gods, or three Lords, but as of one Godhead, one glory, one majesty; since the unity of God is not less a fact recorded in the whole volume of Scripture than his Trinity is; and as strongly inculcated on us by those very transactions on the part of God which reveal to us his threefold nature.

To illustrate to you how just a ground,

on which to rest your belief in the mystery of the Trinity, such an evidence is; I would suggest to you, to consider the parallel case of any common fact, which has occurred to your own observation, or for which you have the testimony of a credible witness. Would you suffer your belief in a fact for which you have such certain evidence, to be weakened by the ingenious reasonings of an objector, who should remark to you,—that he could not account for the fact from principles which you acknowledge no less than himself,—that the witness who reports it to you might possibly have been deceived,—that his words would admit of a construction which would leave the fact at least open to doubt,—or that the fact is so strange and unaccountable, that the mind is placed in the uncertainty of an equipoise between the improbability of the thing related, and that of the falsehood of the witness,—or who should urge any similar sophistical objections? In any familiar case, you would readily answer the objector, that he might puzzle and perplex you, but that he could not ~~destroy~~ your conviction of the

truth of the fact; he might raise a mist before your eyes, but still the fact itself would remain, obscured only, but not removed from its place; that its existence and reality, in short, are matters quite independent of any difficulties in regard to it, which may be felt in your mind. Apply then the like decision of mind to the doctrine of the Trinity. Here is a *fact*, as I have already stated to you, which is the *general result* of the *whole* collection of *Scripture-facts*. You survey all the transactions in which the Bible reports to you the Sovereign Author of the universe to have been engaged; and you are irresistibly led to form a notion of him as subsisting by a Trinity in Unity. You acknowledge the Bible to be the true word of God—you believe all the facts therein recorded to rest on the indisputable testimony of faithful witnesses. Consistently with this profession of belief in the authenticity of the Scripture-narrative, you believe the fact of a Trinity in Unity. Hold then this sacred fact with a firm and unflinching conviction. There is no greater reason in



the transcendent sacredness of the mystery involved in it, that it should be rejected, though attested by the strongest evidence,—than that any other fact should be implicitly believed, which has nothing but good testimony to establish it. Sophistry may weave its cobwebs round the sacred truth, and wrap it from our sight in the folds of human mysticism; but it cannot expunge it from the stubborn record of the Bible. It may suffice to raise within you disquietude and searchings of heart; but it cannot say to the Bible, that it shall *not declare* the truth; it cannot roll back the tide of past events, in which the doctrine of the Trinity is involved.

It may be worth while to state, that it is upon this view of the doctrine of the Trinity that the formulary of the Athanasian Creed is grounded. If that Creed were an expression of abstract opinions formed by human reason on an incomprehensible subject; *then* it would be both rash and profane in any Church to exact a general conformity of declaration on a matter so

precarious in its foundation. But that Creed, on the contrary, presupposes that the doctrine of the Trinity in Unity is a certain fact of Scripture. It simply notes and records what Scripture reveals, and it delivers no opinion whatever concerning the matters revealed and there specified. As a brief statement, it brings together points which are scattered throughout Scripture, collecting in one the rays that diverge from the various facts of the different dispensations of God. This gives it the appearance of being a declaration of opinions ; which appearance is increased from its including a denial of some opinions introduced by heretical innovators upon the faith of Scripture. But we greatly misconceive its nature, if we imagine that it speaks the language of speculative theology. Such is not the spirit in which it has been adopted by our Church. Our Church humbly following Scripture, wishes all her members to make a true confession of what they learn from Scripture ; and, therefore, as I conceive, appoints the doctrine of the Trinity, as the most com-

prehensive declaration of Scripture-truths—as the doctrine in which all other doctrines ultimately centre—to be confessed by her members with peculiar emphasis and distinctness on certain occasions. It is in this spirit, that, as it seems to me, (whatever may have been the design of the composer of the Athanasian Creed, or in whatever way it may be received by the Church of Rome,) our Church at least has made it one of her standing formularies. If accordingly the providences of God related in the Bible lead us to a belief in the triune being of God as a certain fact,—shall we not admit the sound wisdom and propriety of our declaring this fact in the boldest and most solemn manner,—stating it with precision where heretics have defaced and obscured it,—and shewing, that we hold it as *a truth* of divine Revelation, (nothing in which can have been given in vain,) by adding our profession of its unspeakable importance? If we must admit all this, we admit, at the same time, the excellence and the use of the Athanasian Creed; for it has

done nothing more than this.—I trust, my Christian brethren, that with this view of our case, we shall be allowed to confess, that,—“he that will be saved must thus think of the Trinity” ;”—without having either a want of charity, or a vain dogmatism, imputed to us.

The drift of what has been advanced, has been to point out to you, that, as no religion can be received as true, or as at all worthy of the name, which does not rest on authentic facts, developing to us the being and character of God ; so the doctrine of the Trinity has been derived from such facts, and is the combined result of all that are contained in Scripture, from the Creation to the mission of the beloved Son of God ; in whom, and through his Apostles and disciples, the doctrine was ultimately fully declared.

You are now fully prepared, I should

\* The right statement of the Incarnation, added in the Creed, is essential to the right statement of the Trinity.



hope, to go along with me in the assertion, that the doctrine of a Trinity in Unity is one, which, no person who has the Bible before him, and who is able to search and see whether these things are so, can hold it a matter of *indifference* whether he receives or rejects. What I have been endeavouring to impress on you, is, that if the Scriptures exist, this doctrine exists; that it is the very substance of our whole faith; and not a mere article of it: or rather, that either this doctrine *is*, or Christianity is *not*; and that in the act of renouncing it, we depart into another system of faith, and quit that which results from the records of Scripture. If you are thus persuaded, you place the doctrine on a right footing, and hold it in due honour. But, being thus persuaded, you cannot do otherwise than think, that your salvation is intimately connected with this your right belief. As to what may be the divine dealings with regard to those, whom ignorance, or prejudices of education, or peculiar habits of mind, may lead to a rejection of the doctrine,—he alone can judge of the final result, to whom all hearts

are open, and who knows the real causes from which error proceeds, and how far it may be venial. We see only the outward effects, and we know not what palliating circumstances there may be, to constitute the case of any particular individual an exception to the general rule. But, still we may lay it down as a *general rule*,—not at all invalidated by such exceptions,—that a faith, in order to be a saving faith, must embrace the doctrine of the Trinity; or, in other words, that a Christian must be a humble, docile, *scriptural* Christian; or he has no ground to hope for the fulfilment to himself of the promises attached to Christianity. This is the general rule by which our own conduct should be regulated, whether in action, or in verbal profession of our faith. Reason, charity, piety, all disclaim our peremptory application of it to the actual condemnation of *any other* individual: but Scripture—the authoritative voice of Scripture—commands us to bind it on ourselves,—each on himself individually,—as a law which will surely take effect in our own

case: "Them that are without, God judgeth;" but they that are within, must believe life and death to be suspended on those alternatives, on which the word of God has suspended them: and that word has said,—"he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned."<sup>b</sup> And again,—“he that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth in him.”<sup>c</sup> Surely, therefore, each Christian must believe, with regard to *himself*, that it is no light matter to him,—but that it is *his life*,—that he believe rightly what the Son has “declared” of God.

And let us labour to prove by our lives the saving efficacy of that pure profession of Christianity, which we make in professing the doctrine of the Trinity. Our unalterable attachment to this sacred truth,—our zeal in defending it,—above all, our wisdom in understanding it,—are best evinced, not

<sup>b</sup> Mark xvi. 16.

<sup>c</sup> John iii. 36.

by our dexterity in adducing texts in proof of it,—not by our readiness of argument in combating the objections of its opponents—not by our acuteness in distinguishing and guarding our notions from heretical imputations—not, I say, by all these modes of profession, however useful and indispensable in themselves to the maintenance of the doctrine,—but by still more vital and effectual means—by shewing forth the love of the Father, almighty in constraining us to the obedience of dutiful children,—the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, almighty in rescuing us from the bonds of sin and death,—the communion of the Holy Ghost, almighty in consecrating our hearts to the service and glory of that Godhead in which the Holy Three are One. “No man,” says a pious and eloquent Prelate<sup>4</sup>, “can be convinced well and wisely of the article of the holy, blessed, and undivided Trinity, but he that feels the mightiness of ‘the Father begetting him to a new life;’

<sup>4</sup> Bishop Taylor, Vol. 6, p. 403, Bishop Heber's edition.

the wisdom of 'the Son building him up in a most holy faith;' and the 'love of the Spirit of God making him to become like unto God.' . . . . Jesus Christ is best known by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; and if the kingdom of God be in us, then we know God, and are known of him; and when we communicate of the Spirit of God, when we pray for him, and have received him, and entertained him, and dwelt with him, and warmed ourselves by his holy fires, then we know him too: but there is no other satisfactory knowledge of the blessed Trinity but this. . . . There is no knowing of God, theologically, and as he ought to be known, but by the measures of holiness, and the proper light of the Spirit of God."

## SERMON III.

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### THE WEAKNESS AND THE POWER OF MAN.


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1 COR. XV. 56, 57.

The sting of death is sin ; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

IN these words, we have at once the weakness and the power of man set before us ;—his weakness through transgression,—his power through the efficacy of Redeeming Love. The sting of death is sin ;—that which gives death the power of annoyance, and renders it a bitter enemy to human nature, is our disobedience to the commands of God. The strength of sin is the law ;—that which makes our disobedience of so heinous a nature, and so destructive to us, is, the righteous law of a wise and good God, whose holiness can-

not consist with the permitted, unpunished, violation of that law. And thus, both from the sinful nature of man, and the infinite perfection of God, death obtains dominion in the world. But thanks be to God, which *giveth us the victory through* our Lord Jesus Christ. Death still holds a sway over man in consequence of the first transgression. The just award of God must still have its course; for,—“in the day that thou eatest of” the tree of the knowledge of good and evil “thou shalt surely die,”—was the denunciation of one whose words cannot “pass away.” But the sting of death has been removed. It has its power to hurt and to vex, but not to destroy us. It is limited to this world only. Its sceptre is broken and its crown is cast to the ground. It bears, indeed, all the semblance of a triumph over human nature, so far as this world is concerned. But we are assured that this triumph is only temporary, and illusive. Our Lord Jesus Christ has bruised the head of the serpent-tempter, and taken away that venom which could produce in its



victims an eternal sleep; and thus gained for us a decisive, ultimate victory over death and sin.

Such is the general sense of the expressions employed in the text. Their interest demands from us a more exact consideration of them.

I. First then, we are told, that the sting of death is sin. How opposite is this information to the notion generally and practically received in the world respecting the event of death! How little are we accustomed to regard death as a *moral* punishment! From the current of human sentiments and actions, it would appear as if death were only a *natural* evil—an evil which must inevitably ensue in the mere course of nature—and which is appalling to flesh and blood, only as it is a termination of all connexion with the present scene of things, and a melancholy entrance on the shadowy regions of the unknown future world. We practically forget, that death is a sentence pronounced upon us by a Righteous Governor, whose majesty we



have offended by transgression of his will. We regard it rather as a *consequence* of our being born into a world full of successive productions and dissolutions,—from which common observation tells us the body of man presents no exception,—than, as the execution of a *decree* which is gone forth from the lips of One, who is “not a man that he should lie, neither the son of man that he should repent.” The text corrects this vain apprehension. It teaches us to consider the end of our mortal life, in its true relation to the moral perfections of God and the sinful nature of man—in a word, as the *punishment* annexed to sin.

Now, all punishments are intended, not only to inflict pain on the offender for his transgression, but to do him good at the same time as correctives of the fault; and to prevent a repetition, either by himself or others, of the crime for which he suffers. Punishments differ from arbitrary or vindictive inflictions of evil in this important respect, that they have a *moral* intention,—they have a good end in view;—whereas the latter are only the outgoings of some

prevailing passion. A just punishment has no passionate feeling accompanying it; but on the contrary is full of charity to the transgressor. Thus is death designed by God, to be, at once, a retribution for past offences, and a guard against those offences which incurred it. Its moral use, therefore, is overlooked, when we do not perceive that *sin* is its sting—when we dwell intirely upon the accidental circumstances of terror and pain which attend upon it, and turn our eyes from that real terror of the Lord, which renders it a chastisement of mercy.

The importance and the comfort of *thus* regarding sin as the sting of death, will appear, if we contrast—the apprehension of death as a mere natural evil to which we are destined by the doom of mortality—with a conviction of its being the just and merciful award of transgression. If death be regarded as a grievance of nature alone, or, as it is sometimes termed in ordinary discourse—a payment of the debt of nature—there is then no means of abating, still less of averting the evil, which is in *this*

point of view inseparable from the event itself. Whereas, if it be regarded by the light of Scripture as a grievance belonging to our *moral state*—a payment of the debt of *corruption*—rather than the settlement of our account with mortality—then is there some hope, that by availing ourselves of its moral use, the evil attached to it may at least be neutralized—may be converted into a light present affliction, working for us an “exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” Under the first aspect of death, procrastination of the thought of it is our only resource:—the less we admit the apprehension of any impending bodily suffering, so much is gain to us. For we not only save ourselves the misery of much painful anticipation, but the terror arising from the sense of our danger is diminished, by contemplating the evil, though certain, as remote. But it is not so with regard to death considered as a moral evil—as a judgment upon man for disobedience. He who beholds in sin the sting of death, will find his relief in familiarizing his mind to the thought of death.

He will seek to die daily. He will be incessantly labouring to provide an antidote against what he knows to be the only real cause of death—his sinful inclinations—his alienation from God—his love of the world, and of the things of the world. By “mortifying his members which are upon the earth,” he will do much towards rendering the curse of death eventually harmless to himself, and, though as an heir of the sentence pronounced upon Adam, he must die the common death of men—though he must submit to that process of dissolution from which the frail flesh instinctively shrinks—yet death has no dominion over him. Death may coil itself as the venomous serpent around his body, and bind his mortal limbs fast within its embrace; but he is enabled to shake it off, and to come forth uninjured from the assault. Death is indeed awful even to the most reflecting Christian, because he sees in it the heavy hand of divine justice inflicting, —though in a mitigated form, yet still inflicting,—the penalty of transgression. But it is without that alarm which disquiets

the breasts of those who estimate its evil by the standard of worldly privation. The very awe which he feels, consoles him under the trial. He feels that he is in the hand of the Lord, who will do to him according to his good pleasure. He is not distracted with amazement, at the cheerless prospect of being at last swept down with the torrent of universal desolation, which no care—no labour—no religion—can resist.

II. But whence is it that sin has this sting of death belonging to it? This leads us to the second point of the text, where it is asserted, that, “the strength of sin is the law.”

If no divine commandment had been given to man—if the Creator had entirely shrouded himself from his creatures, and sat in silence on his throne—if he had given to man no heart in which his will might be read—no world in which there were signs of him—no Scripture in which his laws were expressly inscribed;—then, it would not have been possible for man to have sinned against God. This is asserted

by Saint Paul, where he says; that “where no law is there is no transgression<sup>a</sup>”; that “sin is not imputed when there is no law<sup>b</sup>”; and again, “without the law, sin was dead<sup>c</sup>.” For, though the Apostle may allude more particularly to the state of the world before the giving of the Mosaic Law, as immediately addressing himself in this Epistle to persons, who required to be instructed in the abrogation of that Law by Christ; yet his expressions are general, and apply also to any condition of mankind prior to the gift of a rule of conduct from God. It is a state of things which has never existed; but supposing it to have existed,—supposing that there ever was a time when God had given no intimation to mankind of his will,—we must clearly perceive, that mankind could then have had no means of pleasing, or displeasing, God by their actions. Sin, therefore, may be considered as *dead*—as not awakened into being—previously to a revelation of the divine will. But such a revelation

<sup>a</sup> Rom. iv. 15.    <sup>b</sup> Ibid. v. 13.    <sup>c</sup> Ibid. vii. 9.

being once made, a new order of things is immediately introduced into the world. It becomes thenceforth no longer a matter of indifference in what way mankind shall act. They must act according to the light of the revelation given; if they would please him, or avoid his displeasure. Whether he speaks to his creatures only in the secret chambers of the heart, and by the unwritten tables of the law of nature; or whether he has his words read in their ears by accredited messengers, he still enjoins something to be done, or avoided, by those who would seek his favour. His commands may vary in number and extent; but in the lowest case of a revelation made, an opportunity is given of obedience or disobedience, of holiness or of sin. The wisdom, moreover, of God is displayed in some measure by any revelation of his will; and it becomes accordingly the wisdom of man, to be taught of God. So also his goodness is displayed in some measure; and it becomes accordingly the goodness of man, to be good, like God. Upon the whole, indeed, in whatever re-

spect the Divine character is made known through a revelation of the Divine will; a conformity to that character becomes the virtue and the happiness of man. And a deviation, consequently, from such a requisite conformity, is a despite done to his grace—a disregard of his holiness—a contempt of his counsel; and, therefore, the vice and the misery of man.

Thus, through man's disobedience, that which was given us in order to the perfection and happiness of our nature, was converted into the fatal occasion of sin and misery,—two sad inmates, which otherwise had been utter strangers to the dwellings of men. "For I was alive," observes the Apostle, "without the law, once; but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." Sin, which the Apostle, in his spirited style of writing, had described as lying dead before the giving of the law, he introduces in this last passage, as roused into action, so soon as the will of God instructing mankind in their duty was re-



vealed. "Sin *revived*" he says; but at the same time he, that is, every son of Adam, "died," or became subject to death. Thus is the law the *strength* of sin. The law was no sooner given than it was transgressed; and sin started up from its horrid repose, to life and activity,—to scatter the seeds of death throughout the earth.

Let it not be understood at the same time, as if the giving of the law, or a revelation of the Divine will, was the *cause* of the sin that followed upon its being given. The law of God remains holy and undefiled, as the Holy Being from whom it proceeds. The sinfulness of man reflects no dishonour on the blessing itself, which he abuses to his ruin. Saint Paul accurately characterizes the relation of a divine revelation to the sin of man, when he speaks of "sin *taking occasion* by the commandment\*." It was that without which sin could not have happened; but which contains nothing in itself leading to sin. On the contrary, as the Apostle remarks, in

\* Rom. vii. 8. 11.

answering this very objection against the law; sin, as “working death in” man “*by that which is good,*” became *on that account* “*exceeding sinful*.” The excellence of the divine law is shewn in its being a rule for the prevention of sin; and the commission of sin in spite of its wise provisions, aggravates the sinfulness of man, instead of excusing his sin on the plea of the law’s imperfection.—The point under consideration may be illustrated by a familiar instance. We give some command to another person, which it is important that he should fulfil. This person neglects or infringes the command given him, and thus incurs our displeasure. Now without any intimation of our wishes, it is clear that there could have been no occasion for the offence; and yet it is equally clear that our command was not the cause of it. That must be referred to the heedless disposition of the disobedient individual.—So in the case of the divine law; the root of bitterness is in the heart of man.

God tempts no man to sin. However great the temptations which the circumstances of our condition in the world may present,—and without some circumstances of trial there could be no discipline of human character,—yet temptations from without cannot avail against us, unless there be principles within us, consenting to the solicitations of evil in the world. The way is always open to us to escape, but we ~~choose~~ not to escape. “Wide” indeed “is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction.” But still, there are also before us “the strait gate, and the narrow way, which leadeth unto life.” Whilst the one invite our steps, and may be found by the blind and the careless, the other may be found no less;—but they must be *sought*. Help is abundantly supplied to us; and if we find them not, it is our own fault, that we have not sought them with care.

Alto “But thanks be to God,” adds the

\* Matt. vii. 13, 14.

text, "which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." So powerful is the sting of death to destroy us, now that its venom has been made rancorous by sin—so strong is sin against our weakness, now that it is clothed with the terrors of the divine law—that man could have no certain escape from these inveterate enemies of his life and peace, except he were gifted anew with power to obtain the mastery of them. We must "first bind the strong man," before we can "enter into his house and spoil his goods." We must have on our side a power stronger than death and sin, which shall bind them for us in indissoluble chains, and confine them to dungeons of everlasting darkness.

But where are we to look for such a power among the sons of men? Who is sufficient for these things among "them of the captivity?" Whence is a deliverer to be expected, when *all* are "sold under sin," and have experienced the debasing influence of bondage? Can there arise a light

See Exodus vii. 9. and vii. 12.

to us out of such gross darkness? Could the soul of hardihood—the spirit of blameless virtue—have been trained for the work of achieving the freedom of mankind, under such untoward fortunes?

Consider what was required on the part of man to retrieve the ruin of his nature. When man had once broken the commandment of God, he destroyed the perfection of his own being. He was thenceforth a different creature as to his whole nature, from what he had been, when he came into the world in the freshness of the divine workmanship. He was unmade as to some portion of what he had been made by God. He was lowered in the scale of moral beings. He was become a corrupt creature. But the law of God continued perfect. The same obedience, which was necessary to make it a *law of life* at the first giving of it, was still required, when man had no longer the same power, as at first, to obey it. To suppose that God would accept an imperfect obedience, is a supposition inconsistent with his holiness; and inconsistent also with that exactness of righteousness,

which he enjoined on mankind at first, in proposing to their obedience one particular precept, instead of simply requiring a general conformity to his will<sup>1</sup>. With the disadvantage, then, of a corrupt nature,—with the sting of death rankling in him—man had still to perform a task, to which he had proved unequal in the day of his strength. He had to commence his work of obedience by a conquest over himself; to bring his own body into subjection; and then to proceed to the active duties of the divine law. No man, we shall readily confess then, could have “by any means redeemed his brother, nor given to God a ransom for him<sup>2</sup>.” The righteousness which could ransom us from the power of death, must be sought from one of untainted blood,—from one, who had never endured the bondage of the tyrant,—whose soul was full of

<sup>1</sup> When the circumstance of God’s enjoining a particular precept on Adam, as a trial of his obedience, is objected to; it may well be asked, whether man could have been more effectually taught the necessity of an *entire* obedience than by a requisition extending to a *minute particular*?

<sup>2</sup> Psal. xlix. 7.

freedom,—and whose body was his own, to offer it a devoted sacrifice to the salvation of mankind.

To him, then,—who came forth from the bosom of the Father, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens<sup>1</sup>,”—who “beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven<sup>m</sup>,”—who said by the voice of prophecy; “O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help. I will be thy king, where is there any other that may save thee in all thy cities? . . . I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction<sup>n</sup>,”—must we look for strength and succour against the tyrants, who are too strong to be resisted by the mere arm of flesh? To be enabled to stand against them, we must go forth in the might of the Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts. His name must be our tower of strength—his wisdom the guide of our counsels.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. vii. 26.

<sup>m</sup> Luke x. 18.

<sup>n</sup> Hosea xiii. 9, 10, 14.

—This twofold victory, my Christian brethren, is now *ours*, by the surest title. The triumph achieved by the incarnate Son of God, is proclaimed through the courts of heaven as the triumph of ~~men~~. But let us remember at the same time, that it is *given* to us,—that we have no right to the glory, or the rewards, of the victory, but through the gift of God. It is his free grace, by which he has admitted us to the adoption of sons in Christ,—and which enables us, therefore, to claim the inheritance of the victory.—The incarnation of the only-begotten Son, is the method by which God has chosen to accomplish the mystery of redemption. We can neither *explain* the method which he has chosen, nor advance the slightest *claim* to its benefits. This is our assurance:—we are saved through Christ:—death and sin are overcome by him *for us*:—and in this assurance we must rest humbly satisfied.—Thanks therefore be to God which *giveth* us the victory. Thanks be to him who, when we were desolate, and dispersed, and lost, had compassion on our low



estate, and "raised up an horn of salvation for us." Death and sin had else still held their iron sway over all the regions of the earth. Like the miserable inhabitants of some enslaved country, we should have lived at this day in abject vassalage to these unrelenting masters;—and the whole world would have been but the land of our captivity, where we might have wept in despondency over the Zion that we had lost. But when "the highways were unoccupied; and the travellers walked through byways"—when we had no heart, no strength among ourselves, "by reason of the bondage,"—then arose the Redeemer at the call of God, leading captivity captive, and bringing rest to our souls.

To this our mighty Saviour let us devoutly pay the merited tribute of thanksgiving, and praise, and blessing. It was not a sacrifice that cost him nothing. It was not without a violent struggle that he cast down the powers of darkness; for he prayed intensely, that, if it were possible,

the cup might pass from him. "His sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood, falling down to the ground." His agony was such as to call for the strengthening presence of an angel from heaven. Instead of the laurel, he wore a crown of thorns :—instead of leading a triumphal procession, he was led "as a lamb to the slaughter :"—instead of being welcomed with acclamations of joy, the wailings of a few devoted followers, mingled with the taunts of scorners, poured their heavy burden on his ear. It is our part, now, to supply the honours denied to him in the day of his victory. Immense as was the sacrifice on his part, it is but little, very little, comparatively, that he expects of us in return. It is but to acknowledge the benefits resulting from his victorious sacrifice, with all our heart,—with all our soul,—with all our strength. It is to receive him—to live to him—as the Lord who bought us;—as his servants—his friends—his brethren—his beloved brethren. So shall his ignominy

\* Luke xxii. 44.

on earth become, through us, his glory in heaven. So shall he that "drank of the brook in the way, lift up his head":—so he "that sowed in tears shall reap in joy":—he that went forth weeping, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.<sup>2, 3</sup>

Psalm cx. 7. \* Psalm cxvi. 5, 8.

our misery we have obtained a relief commensurate with the extent of the evil that oppressed us. As God set his bow in the clouds for a sign that he would no more destroy the earth by a plague of waters; so when that bloody cross, on which Jesus expired, was set up on Mount Calvary, he gave the world an everlasting sign, that he would no more suffer the floods of ungodliness to go over our souls<sup>a</sup>. He proclaimed indeed, by that uplifted memorial of his mercy and peace, that he had “repented of the evil which he thought to do unto” us, and would not “execute the fierceness of his anger,” since he was “God, and not man<sup>c</sup>: that, as in the first Adam, by the unrighteousness of one, all died; so in Christ, the second Adam,—the Lord from heaven,—by the righteousness of one, all were made alive.

Salvation being thus obtained for us solely through the atoning merits of Christ, it is evident that nothing that we may do

<sup>a</sup> See Isaiah liv. 9.

<sup>b</sup> Jerem. xviii. 8.

<sup>c</sup> Hos. xi. 9.

from which a tree of life may spring, must not be cankered at its core. The branches which may flourish with perfect fruits cannot rise from a decayed trunk. To be justified, therefore,—to be accounted righteous in the sight of God—to have any hope of happiness, according to the end designed for us by the Author of our being—we must look beyond ourselves; to some Mediator both able and willing to save, who shall throw himself between our corruption and the throne of the Divine Majesty, and stay the plague from amongst us. It is no question, here, of the degree of that corruption by which our nature is infected. It is enough that we are forced to confess that a corruption *exists* in us. And with this humiliating confession, we own the necessity of seeking a Redeemer.

Happily for us, my brethren, that redemption which we so greatly needed—on which our all depended—has been granted to us. The same Scriptures which tell of our lost happiness, also tell of our restoration to the Divine favour. In the midst of

our misery we have obtained a relief commensurate with the extent of the evil that oppressed us. As God set his bow in the clouds for a sign that he would no more destroy the earth by a plague of waters; so when that bloody cross, on which Jesus expired, was set up on Mount Calvary, he gave the world an everlasting sign, that he would no more suffer the floods of ungodliness to go over our souls<sup>a</sup>. He proclaimed indeed, by that uplifted memorial of his mercy and peace, that he had “repented of the evil which he thought to do unto<sup>b</sup> us, and would not “execute the fierceness of his anger,” since he was “God, and not man<sup>c</sup>: that, as in the first Adam, by the unrighteousness of one, all died; so in Christ, the second Adam,—the Lord from heaven,—by the righteousness of one, all were made alive.

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<sup>b</sup> Jerem. xviii. 8.

<sup>c</sup> Hos. xi. 9.

subsequently, can bestow any *additional* efficacy on the sacrifice once offered and accepted. God has already conferred on us the gift of justification through the intercession of his Son; that Son whom he expressly acknowledged by a voice from heaven as his beloved, in whom he was well-pleased<sup>d</sup>; and as one in whom he had glorified his name<sup>e</sup>. Nothing, therefore, can be added to or diminished from Christ. He is all in all to us. In him the whole mystery of redemption has been consummated. By him all has been “finished.” And all men, consequently,—whatsoever be their creed,—whatsoever their religious knowledge,—whatsoever their attainments in righteousness,—can only be saved through the satisfaction made once for all on the cross.

Here then we perceive the justifying nature of Faith. For it is by faith that God now calls upon us, as hearers of the Gospel, to render valid in our own persons that pardon, which he has freely granted

<sup>d</sup> Matt. iii. 17. — <sup>e</sup> John xii. 28.

to the world at large through the blood of the Redeemer. In the very act of making known to us the way in which it has pleased him to justify fallen man, he has signified to us, that the *knowledge* of it is *all-important to us* to whom he has imparted it. In giving us his word over and above the grace itself of salvation revealed in that word, he would have us understand that, though we are not saved *by* that word (any more than by any other means except by Christ only,) yet we shall not be saved *without* it—that we must avail ourselves of the *revelation* of the redemption, if we would be among the number of the redeemed. The Christian hearer is, with respect to the salvation of the cross, in the situation of the impotent man described by Saint John<sup>f</sup> as lying by the pool of Bethesda. As this poor sufferer needed some helping hand to put him into the troubled water, in order that he might experience its healing virtue; so must faith be to the hearer of the Gospel, his minister on the way to salvation. The blood of Christ is the

<sup>f</sup> John v. 2—9.



Christian's Bethesda. It is that which possesses in it all the healing virtue. But that he may experience its efficacy, he must descend into it. That he may be made clean, he must wash in it. Faith is that by which he must approach it. Faith must guide and support the infirm soul, and put the Christian, as it were, by the hand into the pool which shall make him whole.

Hence arises the force of Saint Paul's assertion,—“that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law,”—an assertion which our Church has formally embodied in her doctrine of justification by faith. In the exposition of a religion, such as that of Christianity,—exacting of its disciple a strict personal holiness, and raising him to happiness by improving him as to the principles of his own nature—but at the same time leading him to *depend* on a righteousness *not his own* for his ultimate perfection and happiness,—it becomes especially necessary, to lay down the principle

\* Rom. iii. 28.

of justification in the most explicit manner; and to establish the *human* righteousness which the religion inculcates, on its proper foundation of the *divine* righteousness. The doctrine of justification by faith accordingly is, in its first intention, a *negative* doctrine. It is intended to serve rather as an entrenchment, or outwork, to protect the sacred keep in which the price of our ransom is deposited; than as any part of the treasure itself. In this sense it is applied by Saint Paul. In his time, the Gospel salvation had been intruded on by certain professors of Christianity, who, though accepting Christ as their Saviour, ascribed a sanctity to the ordinances of the Mosaic Law, which they maintained to be still in force as a law of righteousness. In opposition to a view of the Gospel, so derogatory to its fundamental principle,—Saint Paul urges on the converts the indispensable necessity of returning to the principle from which they had departed;—shewing that, in trusting to any other righteousness *in addition to* that of Christ, they had “fallen from grace;”—pressing on

them the conclusion, deduced from the incontrovertible fact of the universal operation of corruption,—“ that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” But whereas this tendency in man, to assume merit to himself from some acts of his own, is of perpetual force,—for it is part of that very corruption which demanded the grace of redemption,—it is still necessary, that we should preserve that form of sound words, which the Apostle has set forth ; and assert our *exclusive* reliance on the efficacy of the Redeemer’s blood, in the same unqualified manner, in which this inspired teacher of the Gospel has done. We therefore maintain our justification by faith alone—intending thereby entirely to deny ourselves—entirely to exclude ourselves from *any merit whatever* in saving the soul alive—utterly to disclaim our own righteousness, even when we are most righteous.

There is, however, a secondary, and that a highly important sense, in which the doctrine of justification by faith may be

regarded as of *positive* application to the heart of the Christian ; and wherein, when rightly conceived, it becomes instrumental to the furtherance of that salvation through Christ, to which it refers. It is in this sense that we find faith described in the text ; as that by which we are “ born of God ;” and as “ the victory that overcometh the world.” Here, then, it is understood, as the sacrifice of Christ brought home by revelation to the heart of the Christian hearer,—the realization, (if I may so express it,) of the Atonement, so far as the individual Christian is concerned,—the appropriation to himself of the victory gained by his Lord Jesus Christ.

Let me point out to you, how the doctrine of justification by faith, may be applied to this positive practical use.

I. We are instructed by the text, that Faith endears us to God, as it were, by a new creation. Saint John speaks of it as equivalent to, the being “ born of God :” a mode of expression which, his own spiritual-

ity and ardour of mind, appear to have suggested to him as the most natural : since we find him elsewhere employing it ; and, in a very striking manner, at the opening of his Gospel, where he says ;—“ as many as received him, to them *gave he power to become the sons of God*, even to them that believe on his name ; which were *born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *of God*<sup>h</sup>.”

Now, the reason of the application of this very strong expression to the believer in Christ, is to be found in the *origin* of a real faith,—the *divinity* of the source from which it is derived. It is “ the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us<sup>i</sup>.” “ No man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost<sup>k</sup>.” “ If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his<sup>l</sup> :” he is no real Christian—no real believer in the Atonement. The knowledge of the Gospel salvation is not a knowledge neces-

<sup>h</sup> John i. 12, 13. It is properly a Hebraism. See Gen. vi. 2. 4. ; Job i. 6 ; Hosea i. 10.

<sup>i</sup> Rom. v. 5.    <sup>k</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 3.    <sup>l</sup> Rom. viii. 9.

sarily attained "by the wise and prudent." No wisdom or prudence of man is sufficient unto it. It is "revealed unto babes." Wise and prudent indeed are they, that come to Christ as their Saviour ; but it is as "*babes*" that they receive the wisdom of the revelation of him<sup>m</sup>. "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven<sup>n</sup>." These, and the like expressions of God's word, seem clearly to indicate, that a real faith is the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, bringing the revelation of Christ home to his heart.

Thus Faith, in the first place, becomes the means of justification, by bringing us into communion with God. It is to the hearer of the Gospel, the first-fruits of that grace, which it reveals to us, of a redemption through Christ. By imparting to the Christian hearer a knowledge of the great "mystery of godliness," God raises up the soul of man towards himself ; he grafts

<sup>m</sup> Matt. xi. 25—27.

<sup>n</sup> Matt. xvi. 17.

the Christian into the true vine, from which all nourishment unto life is derived. Those of us, my Brethren, who have been faithfully carried to Christ in baptism, have been so grafted; so far as God's promise, of receiving all who come to him in that sacrament, is involved. We have *thus* been born of God. But the healthiness of that graft—the *abiding* in Christ,—is a matter of our own personal faith,—of our personal endeavours to strengthen the grace given to us in the laver of regeneration. If you are now, therefore, abiding in Christ, know that you have cherished in you the Communion of the Spirit. Give God the glory of your faith. Humbly thank him, that you “have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby,” being endeared to him as his children in Christ, you are enabled, *as such*, to “cry Abba, Father.” And henceforth “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>P</sup>.”

° Rom. viii. 15.

P 2 Peter iii. 18.

II. The doctrine of justification by faith may be considered as having a positive application to the heart of the Christian, from its involving an extensive acquaintance with the counsels of God revealed to us in the Scriptures. Whilst we come to Christ as the WAY, we also find in him the TRUTH and the LIFE. "No man knoweth the Son save the Father ; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him<sup>9</sup>." He is "of God, made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption<sup>1</sup>." Thus, too, in his prayer to the Father, he says, "Sanctify them *through thy truth*—thy word is truth<sup>1</sup>." Whilst our faith proceeds from the operation of the Holy Ghost on our hearts, it is through the word given by the Holy Ghost in the Scripture, that our faith is formed and perfected. That is the audible voice of the Spirit calling us to the Gospel-redemption. Our ears must

<sup>9</sup> Matt. xi. 27.      <sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i. 30.      \* John xvii. 17.



be opened to the speaking oracles of the Spirit; and then his still and mysterious voice, perceptible only in the inmost heart, (if perceptible it may be called,) will not be wanting to us. Agreeably to this, Saint Paul speaks of the Scriptures of the Old Testament, as able to make the reader "wise unto salvation *through faith* which is in Christ Jesus<sup>1</sup>." The word preached and delivered in Scripture does not "profit" indeed, "not being mixed with faith in them that"<sup>2</sup> hear or read it. It must be heard and read with a view to that precious redemption of which it tells; that is the master-key to God's manifold dispensations; but it must be surveyed and studied *throughout*, in order to a right faith in the redemption of which it treats. We cannot form any just notion of the sacrifice of the Cross, without an enlarged knowledge of the scheme of revelation. We do not, as some may erroneously suppose, arrive at our knowledge of the nature of the Person and sufferings of Jesus Christ,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 10.<sup>2</sup> Heb. iv. 2.

by simply dwelling on the transactions of Gethsemane and of Calvary; nor even by the descriptions of him contained in the writings of the New Testament; but by making ourselves familiar with Scripture in all its parts.—Nor, again, do we honour Jesus Christ fully, by taking him as the “power of God” unto salvation; unless we take him also, by the same act, as the “wisdom of God.” When we look unto Jesus, we must look unto the Father also, who is “seen” in him; and unto that Holy Spirit who has received of Christ’s and “shewn it” unto us. And so, “by the confession of a true faith,” we shall “acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity.”—In learning the truth of our redemption by the blood of Christ, we shall further be instructed by the word of God, in the proper nature of our condition in the world,—in our fall from original righteousness,—our consequent corruption,—our state of trial and of discipline,—our dependence on the continual providence of God,—the eternity of the life to come,—the certainty of a judgment. In short, every truth of Scripture is cor-

dially received by him who has a faith "according to knowledge," in the Atonement of the Son of God.

And is it necessary then to add, that one so instructed unto the kingdom of heaven, must derive the greatest advantage in his intercourse with the world from the spiritual illumination with which his faith is accompanied? I say not, that an *equal* knowledge of God's manifold dispensations is required of *all*, in order to a right faith. This cannot be expected; when we consider the great differences in intellect, and character, and outward circumstances, of different persons. I only mean, that all must, to the extent of their means, acquire such a faith in Christ. Each must in his situation, and in his degree, avail himself of the light of God's word, whether heard or read, for the instruction and cultivation of his faith.

III. But there is a still more intimate view of the doctrine of justification by Faith, as a truth of positive application to the heart of the Christian—that in which

it more strictly coincides with the account of faith in the text, as the victory that overcometh the world. He that sincerely believes in Jesus Christ as his Redeemer—regarding him, as the Son of God made man, —the co-equal in glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit, disrobing himself of that light in which he walked unseen by mortal eye, and entering the lowly tabernacle of the flesh for the sake of men—for the sake of us miserable sinners—he, I say, who sincerely believes this wonderful fact, cannot but feel his heart dilate with reverential love and gratitude at the thought. When, in the full consciousness of our own inability to retrieve the ruin of our souls, we consider the great mercy we have obtained—no less than the gift of immortality with God, when we had forfeited even the happiness of our earthly condition—and contemplate God through the veil of the Incarnation, *himself* paying the ransom of our freedom—do not our hearts burn within us? And are we not ready to exclaim in devout admiration,—‘Behold how he loved us!’ Surely, every thought of our

Saviour's person—his actions—his words—must inspire us with delight. We shall eagerly open the Sacred Volume which tells of him, to find out every trace in it, of one in whom we feel so intense an interest. We shall be anxious to know what his character was in every respect,—that we may study it and conform ourselves to it:—whether he has laid any express injunctions on those who would be his disciples,—that we may hear them, and do them:—whether he has pointed out any sure marks by which his redeemed should be distinguished—that we may observe them, and exhibit them in ourselves. It is mere trifling with the redemption of the Gospel, to say, that we rely on it exclusively for our acceptance with God, and to have no thought of the Redeemer himself:—it is a vain profanation of his blood, to regard it as poured out for our sins, and not to sympathize with the heart from which it flowed:—it is a despite to his grace, to pretend to love his grace, and not to cherish his example, and his word—to receive the pardon, but to slight its obligations.

Further—if we are duly impressed with a sense of the grace of redemption through the blood of Christ, we shall be scrupulously watchful of ourselves; lest, after that so much has been done for us, we should render the sacrifice vain, in respect to ourselves, through any fault on our part; —lest, through our indifference, or perverseness, that soul should perish, which is now no longer ours, but the Lord's who redeemed it. The true believer in the Gospel Atonement feels strongly the force of the apostolical exhortation. “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are *not your own?* For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit *which are God's*.” He will perceive the real value of his soul, as taken out of his own hands, and placed in the keeping of the Spirit. He will be careful, not to desecrate with impurities, the body on which his faith has inscribed—“holiness

to the Lord." He will beware; lest he aggravate his condemnation as an heir of corruption, by undoing all that has been done to render him an heir of immortality; and labour diligently, that, though justified, he may be justified *still*.

Thus Faith becomes practically the victory that overcometh the world. It is not in itself that victory;—for the merits of the Redeemer are the victory;—but it becomes so *practically*. By emptying ourselves of all pretension to self-righteousness, and resting our faith unreservedly on the righteousness of Christ; we establish to ourselves a strong and sure principle of religious conduct, whereby the temptations of the world may be resisted and overcome. And it is thus victorious, because it ascribes all its power to Christ—because, in every exertion which it makes, it has a thankful remembrance of Christ, and does all to the glory of God through him.

Here then you have before you a sketch of that Faith, by which we are said to be

justified. To fill up the sketch would be to give you the full portrait of Christianity. For according to the view which I have endeavoured to present to you of it, it is only the comprehensive—the characteristic—expression for the whole religion of the Bible. It is Christianity in the heart—in the actions—on the lips. It is divine power strengthening human weakness—divine wisdom informing human folly—divine goodness meliorating human corruption—divine love warming human coldness—in a word, the life of God transfused into the life of man.

But here you have also before you your pattern. Is *your* faith such as may achieve the victory of the world? Is it in the first place, an *exclusive* reliance on the mediation of Christ—an entire denial of yourselves as to any power of saving your own souls—a dedication of the whole man at the altar of the Cross? This is the inquiry with which we must commence. Without this foundation it is impossible that we can have a justifying Faith—we have no



life in us—no hope of victory over the world.

Proceed then to ask yourselves, whether your faith is indeed the Atonement of the Cross *revealed to your hearts*—whether it realizes *in your case* the Atonement made for sin? Look to the points to which I have called your attention. Has your faith brought you to God the Father, as his sons by a new creation; as really born of him? Is it founded on a trust in the secret indwelling of the Spirit in your hearts; and maintained, by cherishing that blessed Communion, according to the appointed means? To ascertain this satisfactorily,—inquire of yourselves, whether you have strictly followed the directions of Scripture in order to obtaining the Spirit of sanctification: whether you have sought the gift of a saving faith in Christ, by the *means of grace*,—by prayer, the word of God, and the sacraments. Unless you have thus rooted and stablished yourselves in the faith, it is too certain that you have not a justifying faith. That must come

from the Spirit. If then you have not fervently prayed for the Spirit,—if you have not made yourselves familiar with the words of the Spirit,—if you have not valued the washing of the Spirit in baptism,—nor fed on the banquet of the Spirit by partaking of the mystical food of Christ's body and blood ;—where is there any ground of trust, that you have ~~that~~ faith which is the gift of the Spirit ?

Another point of inquiry is, whether the faith which you profess, is, at once, the foundation of your hope of immortality, and your advancement in religious wisdom—whether Christ Crucified is so received by you, that in confessing him as “ the Way,” you have also found in him, “ the Truth and the Life,”—whether you have obtained a comprehensive view of the scheme of revelation, and devoutly accepted all the truths, which God has been pleased to connect with the declaration of pardon through Christ. Simply to dwell on the bare fact of the Atonement, is not to know that fact in its full importance. Examine, there-

fore, whether you have studied it *fully*. Be assured that your faith is not sound, unless it is, as it were, the condensed expression of the *whole counsel* of God revealed in the Scriptures?

Lastly, do you find the fruits of your faith, in its enabling you to overcome the world, through the love of Christ constraining you?—This was the third point to which I called your attention.—Do you find it a principle of love to your Redeemer—bringing him constantly before your view—conforming you to his likeness—and prompting you to a hearty obedience to his commandments? Does it mortify your corrupt affections? Does it make you *tender* of your own souls? Here is a mark which cannot be mistaken. No man can be sensible of the value of Redemption—no man can look unreservedly to Christ as the Lord his Righteousness—who does not feel the love of his Redeemer a stirring motive to active obedience—who does not estimate the importance of his soul, at the price which he believes to have been paid for it. He that loves the

Redemption of the Gospel, will love also the *labour* which it imposes on him.—If, my Brethren, you “love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity,” you have cheerfully taken *his Yoke* upon you, and so found rest to your souls.

To sum up the whole,—Salvation is of grace. Faith to acknowledge that salvation, is of grace. We can do nothing of ourselves. It is God who worketh in us, all in all; giving us both to will and to do of his good pleasure; and giving to all liberally. This is the piety of Christianity. This is the pious sentiment, with which the Christian hearer holds every doctrine of his religion; and with which he begins and ends every duty which it enjoins on him. He “determines not to know any thing save Jesus Christ and him crucified.”—But, at the same time, he feels within himself a principle of responsibility. This gives him an instinctive persuasion, which no acquired principles can destroy, that his future happiness or misery is, in some measure, dependent on his own exertions. He finds moreover the Gospel full of exhortations

to holiness—full of denunciations against iniquity and remissness—full of wise counsel for the direction of conduct. All these modes of address he feels to be perfectly natural to him—to be, what a creature endowed with responsibility, would expect from the Author of Revelation.—He therefore holds both principles of his religion in perfect consistency. In his actions as a Christian, he is all life and spirit, as fearful that his part may be wanting. Again, he is all life and spirit, as knowing that his reward is not “of debt” but “of grace,”—that “the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”<sup>1</sup>;” but that, through Christ strengthening him, he can do all things. He labours, as if the kingdom of heaven must “suffer violence,” and “the violent” must “take it by force”<sup>2</sup>;” but he labours cheerfully, knowing, that his Saviour has “overcome the world,” and that his “labour will not be in vain in the Lord.”

<sup>1</sup> Jer. x. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xi. 12,

## SERMON V.

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### FAITH CHARACTERIZED.

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1 COR. xv. 58.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

THERE are few, perhaps, in any Christian congregation who have not meditated on these words of the Apostle, at a moment, when they appealed to the heart with a force of divine consolation, and were found to be the words of wisdom and of nature. Most of us who have had any experience of the passing scenes of this world, have, at some time, stood in sorrow by the dead ; and amidst our perplexity of thought at the mysterious dispensation of providence, which brings indiscriminately to the dust

all that is great, and good, and precious among men, have felt the encouraging voice of the text sink into our hearts with power.

But whilst the doctrine of a Resurrection to life eternal, to which the text refers, is pregnant with wise comfort to the afflicted spirit of man,—comfort is not its principal practical intention. As life eternal is the peculiar revelation of Christianity—the exclusive sanction and promise of the Faith in Christ Crucified ;—the leading application of it must consist in its importance, as an argument for maintaining the Faith with constancy and zeal ; so that we may be inheritors of the immortality bequeathed to us by our Redeemer. And this is the great use which the Apostle has made of the doctrine. He expressly connects it with the victory over death and sin, obtained for us, and given to us, through our Lord Jesus Christ. To this their proper application accordingly I purpose, on the present occasion, to call your attention,—following the words of the Apostle in the order in which they occur.

But first, it is not irrelevant to observe in passing, the affectionateness of manner with which the appeal of the text is recommended. The subject, which Saint Paul had been discussing in this chapter of his Epistle, was one which could not but touch the heart of him who had a deep conviction of its vital truth.—How intensely must it have acted on the ardent heart of this Apostle!—For to know that we are all equally, in respect of the merciful design of God towards us, heirs of salvation to a life of immortality,—purchased for us by a common Redeemer,—is, to know that we are bound to each other by a new tie of endearment. It is, to know that each fellow-creature is a brother for whom Christ died. And if we love Christ in return for his great love to us, we must love also those that are Christ's. The least of his "little ones" is dear to us, *because* they are his.—Well then did the Apostle speak the language of a believer in the Christian Resurrection, when, pouring forth the tide of his own feelings in the very utterance of the sacred truth, he found himself con-



strained to address his converts in words of affectionate exhortation, as his "beloved." And well is it for us, here to observe and copy his example; impressing on ourselves the duty, of feeling a warm interest for every member of the family of Christ, as we value the salvation itself of the Gospel.

Having thus forcibly appealed to the hearts of the faithful,—shewing, at once, his love for them, and the duty of Christian love as resulting from the Faith of the Gospel,—the Apostle opens his exhortation with the precept; "be ye stedfast." This expression is equivalent to another, which he elsewhere employs; where he speaks of "*holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering* \*." Stedfastness implies, the being deeply and firmly grounded in any persuasion or pursuit; and keeping such hold of it, as to follow it with invariable attachment to the principles on which we have adopted it. In our religious pro-

\* Heb. x. 23.

fession it emphatically signifies what I have here described. Here, more than in any other pursuit, it is especially necessary, that we should have determinate principles of action—not vaguely adopted through mere tradition, but matured by the patient deliberation of our own judgment—not the variable suggestions of the moment, but abiding convictions—actuating the man on all occasions, and forming an essential constituent of his character.

Now,—do we exhibit this requisite steadfastness in our religious conduct? Does the advice of the Apostle in this respect, come home to our bosoms, and meet with a congenial reception there? Have we diligently examined into the nature of our religion, so as to have discerned it in its real, characteristic, importance? And have we accordingly so embraced it; founding our hope of immortality, and all our conduct as professors of that hope, on the actual basis of Christianity itself?

Let us consider what, agreeably to this

view of our obligation as Christian professors, steadfastness in the faith requires of us.—It requires of us to know, and heartily believe, this great fundamental truth—this religion of our religion, if it may be so termed,—that God was in Jesus Christ reconciling the world to himself. An unreserved faith in the atoning blood of the Divine Redeemer—a faith exclusively devoted to Christ as its proper object—really *Christian* in the notion of it—must be the first great qualification of the believer, in order that he may have steadfastness in his religious profession. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid which is Jesus Christ<sup>b</sup>.” Unless we set out with obtaining accurate information on this point, it is not possible to build up any solid superstructure of religion.

And how are we to set about the learning of this vitally-important truth? It is not by collecting the hearsay of the world. We shall find no sure footing by this method of inquiry. The world, unhappily,—though

<sup>b</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 11.

Redemption is the theme, which should resound in all its regions, and be hailed with grateful adoration, wherever a human soul may be found,—is not the school in which such divine instruction can be gained. Instead of leading us in the way to Christ, it seeks only to imbue us with the principles of its own philosophy. Instead of encouraging us to listen to the message of Angels proclaiming,—“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men,”—it amuses and deludes us with its own imaginations; so that the tidings of salvation are overpowered and lost amidst its vain and busy tumult. It is true, we hear something of Christian salvation in the world. By the outward ordinances observed among us, each person, however thoughtless, it must be supposed, cannot but know that there is such a subject of interest, as the redemption of man by the sacrifice of a Saviour. But knowing the sacred truth in this way, is not knowing it in a *religious* way. It is knowing it only after a worldly manner. It is having only an indefinite notion of it.

And such a notion is quite inconsistent with that stedfastness enjoined by the Apostle.—Let us not, my Brethren, so vainly, and absurdly, rest our religious profession on the hearsay of the world.

Neither again let us rest it on the presumptions of our own reason. Degrade not “the wisdom which is from above,” by bringing it down to so precarious an authority. There are some, who have their preconceived notions of divine truth, according to which they mould their system of religion; making even the plainest texts of Scripture bend in submission to their arbitrary views; and accepting nothing as part of the Gospel, which does not coincide with their determinations as to what *ought* to be found in the Bible. These persons indeed have recourse to Scripture. They do not take up religious opinions idly and indifferently. They are able to give some “reason of the hope that is in them.” But still, they are far from the method of acquiring that stedfastness, which characterizes a right faith. When God gave an express revelation to man he signified to

human reason,—“hitherto shalt thou come, but no further; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.”—He appointed that revelation to be accepted by reason, not to be measured by it.—And none therefore, who apply their reason as the measure of divine truth, can reach its height. The great Corner-stone of the Gospel cannot be quarried out with tools of mere earthly manufacture. It must be dug and fashioned with those, which the Holy Ghost has placed in our hands, in giving us the Scriptures.

No stedfast knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus, we conclude then, can be obtained from such modes of inquiry, as, either the world, or human reason, may present. Neither of these blind guides can bring us to Christ. To ask them the way is not to seek him. To build our faith on their dictates, is not to build on him.

The only right method of coming to Christ is that to which I have just adverted:—implicitly to follow the guidance of God's holy word. Whilst we explore “the mind of the Spirit,” in the writings

indited by the Spirit, we shall obtain grace to receive the Atonement of the Gospel, in its characteristic importance among the truths of Christianity. We shall be enabled, in studying this sacred truth in its own place, to perceive its universality and ubiquity in the dealings of God towards man—to trace it, as a golden thread running through the whole texture of Scripture, and giving its brilliancy to every information and rule contained in the Sacred volume. Thus directed, we shall firmly embrace the doctrine of Christ Crucified as the foundation of our Christian profession. And though to the carnal mind this doctrine may be a stumbling-block, as disappointing its ambitious views,—though to the proud reasoner of this world, it may seem foolishness, as not corresponding with his self-suggested anticipations—still, as knowing that it is written in indelible characters in the page of inspiration, we shall hold it fast, as a doctrine which is true, as God's word is true.

But the Apostle not only says; be ye

stedfast. He strengthens the exhortation by a call to the Christian convert to be also *unmoveable*. The words here conjoined have nearly the same meaning. As however we may more strictly understand by steadfastness, the adopting the fundamental principle of our religion—the doctrine of Christ Crucified—in its true Scriptural sense ; on which alone, as on a firm rock, our system of faith may rest steady and secure ; so we may interpret the precept of being “ unmoveable,” as applying particularly to the danger, of being drawn away from those religious principles which we have maturely adopted, by any temptation, whether of novel doctrine, or of the pleasures of the world. You will remember, that the Apostle Paul speaks of some unstable Christians, as “ not enduring sound doctrine ;” as “ heaping to themselves teachers, having itching ears ;” — that he cautions the Ephesians, that, when “ come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a per-

\* 2 Tim. iv. 3.



fect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ, they be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine<sup>d</sup>." If we hold fast the truth, as it is in Jesus, we shall show no countenance to those ingenious glosses, which render Scripture only the multifarious echo of each conflicting sect or party in religion. We shall not suffer ourselves to be deluded by articles of faith, founded on partial views of the divine dispensations, or on the mere words of Scripture. But, "holding the head," we shall also hold all the members of the Faith, in their vital connexion with the head. Whilst we adopt Christ Crucified, as the fundamental characteristic of our religious profession, we shall maintain the other doctrines of Scripture in their full importance. Taking the Christian Redemption from its proper source—the Scripture—we shall take along with it, all those other holy and edifying truths, with which it is there closely and insepar-

<sup>d</sup> Eph. iv. 13, 14.

ably intertwined. And, thus obtaining a comprehensive and consistent view of the whole scheme of Divine Revelation, we shall not only defy the attacks of the ostensible infidel, but also be proof against the more dangerous wiles of insidious traitors to Christianity, bearing the sacred name of its disciples, whilst breathing war against it in their hearts and their proceedings. Our conviction will be, that we have placed our trust in One, in whom all the counsels of God towards man have their perfection;—and, that though an Angel from heaven should preach to us any doctrine at variance with the great mystery of his Atonement, we should believe it not—that all must be true, which the Scripture has joined with this mystery in the scheme of revelation, however inexplicable to us, however apparently to our judgment unconnected with it;—that whatever militates with this mystery, must be false, however speciously Scriptural in its assertion, and however plausibly supported by ingenuity of argument. We shall check that propensity of the human mind, which

prompts the unstable believer, to follow after new preachers and new doctrines—in simplicity and sincerity we shall inquire only for “the old paths”—the beaten ways, tracked by the footsteps of our forefathers in Christ, those holy professors of the Christian faith, who learned at the foot of the Cross, what they preached from the pulpit, or inculcated in their writings, or set forth to general example in their lives: not pursuing our religion,—as we would a mere human science, which admits of advancement by the labours of successive inquirers,—but as a knowledge, perfect in its origin—as best understood, when it was first taught, and was as yet unalloyed by human inventions—as a science, like its Divine Author, “the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.”

Further,—whilst we beware of being moved from the profession of scriptural Christianity by innovations upon the Faith,—there is a teaching, no less fatal to our

• Heb. xiii. 8.

stability as Christians,—though it addresses us not in words, nor weaves the toils of argument to ensnare us,—of which it behoves us to be sedulously watchful :—for it possesses in it a charm more powerful than a thousand tongues :—the teaching, I mean, of the world, by its corrupt pleasures and corrupt examples. The believer in Christ, so long as the world constitutes his scene of trial and discipline, is ever exposed to some risk from those circumstances in which he is necessarily engaged ;—a risk, not only as to his *conduct*, but as to the *principles* of his belief.—It is obvious indeed, that the man of God, and the man of worldly pleasure, are utterly incompatible characters<sup>f</sup>. They are like natives of different soils—born under different institutions—and formed by different habits of life. Their tongues, their customs, and their manners, are entirely dissimilar. They must learn therefore of each other, if they would hold friendly intercourse ; and, in the process of assimilation, each must un-

<sup>f</sup> See James iv. 4.   <sup>1</sup> John ii. 15, 16.

learn some of his distinctive peculiarities. The man of God must forego some of his divine sentiments and language ; and the man of the world must cease to do, entirely at least, after the ways of the world.— But it is not only in the conversation, and actions, of the Christian, that a change must take place, from unguarded intercourse with the worldly ; but the very principles of his faith are infected by the dangerous contagion. For how can worldly practice accord with a strict, religious profession ? Either the religious profession must influence the conduct ; or the conduct will influence the profession. That inward strife, and vexation of spirit, cannot long be endured, when the conscience is ever acting as the angry censor of the actions of a man. Peace must be obtained at any rate within the disquieted bosom. The judge of conduct must be corrupted, that a favourable sentence may be passed on the irregular action. The creed must be unsaid, that the infidelity of the outward behaviour may not offend the unstable Christian. Such at least is the tendency of

unrestrained intercourse with the world. And the Christian believer must therefore anxiously guard himself against these enchantments. The man of God, instead of listening with a fatal attention to the seductive voice of the world, is “stedfast and unmoveable.” His face is set towards the holy hill of Sion ; and no prospects of pleasure will have force to make him wander into paths that lead him astray from his proper home. He has taken his stand on “the Rock of ages ;” and the quicksands with which he is surrounded, however smiling to the eye with verdure and flowers, will not tempt him to abandon his sure ground.

The Apostle proceeds to direct the Christian disciple to persevere diligently in the Faith to which he is pledged, adding to the exhortation—“always abounding in the work of the Lord.” By this precept, we may see the true meaning and value of a Faith in Christ. It is shewn to be a lively, energetic, growing faith—a principle, not more acquiescence in the doctrine of atonement, but of encouragement to ac-

tive duty. For Saint Paul not only suggests to us the importance of proceeding in our good profession, but in *a Work—the work* of the Lord;—and not only of proceeding, but of *abounding* in that work —“*always abounding* in the work of the Lord.”—There is then, it is plain, a work to be performed by us, if we would be “stedfast, unmoveable” Christians;—something to be *done*,—not only to be *believed*. Though it is essential to sound religion, that we should begin with right convictions;—yet such convictions are not its sum and substance. They are only the outlines, which must give the true form and character to our religious actions. The actions of the Christian are the life-blood—the sinews—the solid flesh,—which fill up those outlines, and display them to the view in all their beauty and expression. It is not the persuasion—the inward feeling—the presumption, or the “*verily thinking*”—that we are Christians—that makes us *truly and fully* Christians. Or why should Saint Paul exhort us to the *work of the Lord*?—and why again should he

insist on our *abounding* in that work? It is true indeed, that those who have heartily embraced their religion, will feel that sincerity of conviction—that ardency of heavenly love—that inward consolation and joy and fulness of hope,—which it is the office of the Holy Spirit to impart to the faithful servant of Christ: for Christ sends even now his Comforter, according to his promise, to strengthen the heart of faith: but let us recollect, that such as are animated by this holy joy,—such as feel “their faith of eternal salvation to be enjoyed through Christ” established and confirmed, and the “love of God fervently kindled” in them,—do not arrogate to themselves any *sudden* and *groundless* confidence. The reality of the Divine presence by the Spirit with the believer, must not be confounded with the gross imaginations of the heart of man. Their feeling of joy is the *result* of conduct, harmonizing with their belief, and strengthening their belief by its accordance. It is not the work of a moment; but of days—of years. It is the joy of going on towards perfec-



tion. It combines the glad retrospect, of past improvement in the knowledge of the Truth, and of past exertion, with the inspiring prospect of future increase, both in religious knowledge, and practical holiness. They find their hope of free justification—their trust of being made sons of God by adoption—“full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort,”—*because* they are “godly persons”—*because* they are “walking religiously in good works,”—*because* they are becoming, (as they reasonably judge of themselves, by comparison of their present state with their former), more and more “like the image of Jesus Christ;”—“feeling in themselves the working of the Spirit, mortifying the works of the flesh, and their earthly members,” as well as “drawing up their minds to high and heavenly things.”

Lastly, we have, as the Apostle insists in concluding his exhortation, the strongest encouragement to *abound* in the work of the Lord : forasmuch as we “know, that our labour will not be *in vain* in the Lord.”

Call to your minds those memorable words of our Redeemer—" *I am the Resurrection and the Life* : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me *shall never die* " :—and judge, whether Saint Paul had not just ground for the exulting tone, in which he exhorts his converts to perseverance in their holy calling. Having a full assurance, that, though worms may destroy this body, yet we shall hereafter see God in our flesh—that the dominion of corruption has its certain bounds appointed, beyond which it cannot pass—that, though we must return to the dust whence we came, yet the Spirit of God has spoken the omnipotent word,— "*come again*, ye children of men " :—how should we be stimulated to a zeal proportionate to our mighty hope? *Therefore* it is, that we may well " be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Had we been left in suspense as to the final result of stedfast faith,

\* John xi. 25.

† Psalm xc. 3.

—had we been suffered to plod our weary way through this homeless world, without knowing assuredly that a rest was reserved for us,—had we been pushed off on the stream of life, without the solacing conviction, that there was a power above which even the winds and the sea obey, and that we should ultimately arrive at “the haven where we would be,”—our hearts might then have failed us; and, disappointed in the apparently devious tendency of our present course,—in the evident feebleness and insufficiency of our exertions,—we might have stopped on the way, and remitted those very exertions, on whose *continuance* our ultimate success depended. But *now* there is no suspense to the Christian. Let him but be *true* to his profession, and he will triumph in the end. The sting of death is removed from him;—the stone is rolled away from his grave;—to look for him within its enclosure would be, to “seek the living among the dead;”—“he is not here;”—because Christ has risen, he has risen also—because Christ lives, his disciple lives also. Re-

garding himself, therefore, in the confidence of his hope, as one already risen with his Saviour, he is dead to the world, but alive unto God through Christ. He seeks those things which are above. Convinced that his "labour is not in vain in the Lord," he continues stedfast in the faith; that by perseverance in well-doing, he may "receive the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul<sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. i. 9.

## SERMON VI.

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### THE WORK OF THE LORD.

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JER. XLVIII. 10.

Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord  
deceitfully.

THIS warning of the Prophet is immediately applicable to his own countrymen alone, as a people commissioned in a peculiar manner, to “do the work of the Lord.” They were employed by express appointment in several instances, as the executioners of the wrath of God on the sinful nations of the world; who, having filled up the measure of their iniquity, were ripe for the harvest of destruction. On such occasions, the sword of Almighty vengeance was placed in the hands of the Children of Israel; and they had the task imposed on them, of carrying it through the devoted

land with exterminating violence. In fulfilling the task to which they were thus appointed, they had no discretionary power left to them, as to the *extent* to which their obedience should proceed. As the service on which they were employed, was only lawful to them, as it arose from a positive command, and as, consequently, they were the delegates and agents of Divine Power and Wisdom;—so was the *mode* of discharging it only lawful, when it was precisely that which God had appointed. By introducing any limitation of the divine commands, or adding any particular for which they had not the same authority, they abandoned the only principle which, at the same time, both justified and sanctified their conduct\*.

\* See particularly 1 Samuel xv. That there should be something mysterious, and apparently objectionable, in such transactions, is to be accounted for on the same principle. They were “works of the Lord,” though executed by the hands of men; and they must therefore be expected to contain their mystery, as well as any other works of the divine counsel. It is mere folly to expect that we should see the whole

They presumed by such a step, to be more wise and just than God,—to please him by following their own suggestions, rather than by doing his good pleasure,—in a word, as the Prophet Jeremiah here expresses it, they “did the work of the Lord deceitfully.”

But not only these chosen agents of Almighty Counsel, but ourselves also, my Brethren, are liable to this charge of “doing the work of the Lord deceitfully;” and we need therefore to consider, and apply to our own case, the denunciation of woe here authoritatively made against those who shall incur such guilt. We have not indeed, like the Jews, so grievous a burden laid on us, as to be called to execute, by warrant from Heaven, some extraordinary purpose of Almighty Vengeance,—we are not required to steel our hearts to a work, in which every other feeling

*reason* of them in any instance. And the difficulty we experience with regard to them, consists at most in our not seeing the *whole* reason.

of our nature is merged in simple devotion to the Divine command,—but still we have received a commission from God,—still is there a call gone forth to us, to “forget our own people and our father’s house<sup>b</sup>,” and to do the work of the Lord with entire acknowledgment of his supremacy in our affections,—that work of which the Apostle admonished the Corinthians, in exhorting them to “abound in the work of the Lord,”—the work implied in a “stedfast, unmoveable,” faith in Christ Crucified.

To this work enjoined on the Israel of Christ, let us apply the warning of the Prophet: considering (as we are authorized in doing,) the dealings of God towards the ancient Israel, as the type of his dealings towards his Elect in his Son<sup>c</sup>.

There are three leading considerations, under which the Christian “work of the Lord” may be regarded. We may view it, 1. as to the nature, or kind, of “work”

<sup>b</sup> Psalm xlv. 10.      <sup>c</sup> See Rom. ix. 8. 24—26.



required of Christians :—2. as to the extent of the service to which it obliges them :—3. as to the spirit, or feeling, with which the work must be performed. If the work done by the Christian is defective in any of these points of view, it is done *deceitfully*.

I. To proceed in stating the nature, or kind, of “work” required of Christians ;—I cannot more properly do so, than by the comprehensive designation of it, as a *spiritual work*,—the offering up of the heart—the consecration of the affections to God as revealed to us in Christ,—the being “*fervent in spirit*,” as Saint Paul says, “serving the Lord<sup>c</sup>.” Consistent with this is the declaration of our Saviour, in answer to the inquiry of the disciples—“what shall we do that we might work the works of God ?—this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent<sup>d</sup>.” Christianity is not a system of positive and formal ordinances, which may be ade-

<sup>c</sup> Romans xii. 11.

<sup>d</sup> John vi. 28, 29.

quately performed whilst the heart is far from them. As distinguished from all other religions, it is preeminently a spiritual religion.—The Jewish Law,—though it was in its real nature, when freed from those vain traditions, which had disfigured it, and “made the word of God of none effect,” an approximation to the spirituality of the Gospel,—yet was not in its immediate force a spiritual service. It combined, as every true religion must, both the love and the fear of God :—but the fear of God was its predominant principle ;—and an appropriate principle in it, inasmuch as it was an *infant* religion. Men were to be reclaimed from gross ignorance, and superstition, and idolatry,—that is, from the fear of gods that were no gods, by having the fear of the true God implanted in them. Stupidity and folly were to be awakened, by a strong appeal to the principle of fear ; which exists in vigour amidst a general debasement of our moral and intellectual nature ; whilst the principle of love towards God flourishes only in the refined and softened heart.

Full therefore as Judaism was of divine arguments to the love of God ;—expressly as it told of the necessity of serving God with the heart — of loving God with all the heart and soul,—and said to its disciple ; “ my son, give me thine heart ! ”—it was more immediately bent on impressing mankind with a sense of the awful majesty of Jehovah, as “ a mighty God and terrible ”—merciful and gracious indeed, but as one at the same time executing vengeance—as “ a jealous God, visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children ”—as pouring out “ the cup of his fury ”—as “ a consuming fire ”. Whilst accordingly it possessed a spirituality to all who with faithfulness availed themselves of the light which it gave ; and who thus made “ the fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom ”—the groundwork of a better knowledge, and of a love of him ;—with the generality of its disciples, it was little more than a “ *fear* of the

<sup>e</sup> Deut. vi. 5. x. 12.

<sup>f</sup> Prov. xxiii. 26.

<sup>s</sup> Deut. vii. 21.    <sup>h</sup> Isa. li. 17.    <sup>i</sup> Deut. iv. 24. ix. 3.

Lord,"—a system of propitiatory rites sought to avert the displeasure, or conciliate the favour, of the Lord of all power and might.—On the other hand, in the religion of the Gospel, the love of God is the groundwork and predominating principle. Here we have also the principle of the fear of God forcibly inculcated; we are desired to *fear* him who can "destroy both body and soul in hell<sup>j</sup>,"—to work out our salvation "with fear and trembling<sup>k</sup>,"—to pass "the time of our sojourning in fear<sup>l</sup>:" but here we are encouraged also, by perfecting love, to "cast out fear<sup>m</sup>:" here God delights to be called the God of love—to have all his divine attributes comprehended in that of love. "God is love<sup>n</sup>," is its language—the burden of its sacred instructions. To all, accordingly, who have ears to hear, the words of Christ's revelation are the LIFE and the TRUTH. To all who have heard his voice speaking in the Gospel, the hour is come, when

<sup>j</sup> Matt. x. 28. Luke xii. 5.

<sup>k</sup> Phil. ii. 12.

<sup>l</sup> 1 Pet. i. 17. <sup>m</sup> 1 John iv. 18. <sup>n</sup> 1 John iv. 16.

“the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth.” We are arrived at those “good things to come,” of which the Law was “a shadow.” We are brought to that “kingdom of God which is within us.” The theocracy under which we live, is the sceptre of righteousness ruling the inner man. Being released from the bondage of the flesh, we are required to render an homage consistent with our state of spiritual freedom. The service of the heart, therefore, is the work to which we are called. The love of God towards us being the great principle of our religion, the devotion of the heart is the only mode, by which the religion is acknowledged in its proper character. It is the only service consistent with the grace of God manifested in the Gospel. He who gives up his heart to God, freely gives, as freely he has received. The love of God, indeed, “constraineth” him, but it is a constraint delightful and joyous—it is a happy surrender

\* John iv. 23.

† Luke xvii. 21.

of himself to the Author and Giver of all good things,—a “service,” which is “perfect freedom.”

But whilst we readily acknowledge, that the spiritual service of the heart is the work to which the Christian is called; it is very possible that we may yet practically pervert the nature of the work, and thus be deceitful doers of it. And here let us look to the case of those, who are not sufficiently careful to discriminate between a pure spiritual devotedness to God, and the distempered workings of their own fancy. To do the will of God from the heart, requires no laboured elevations of soul beyond the bounds of a sober and modest piety. An affectionate sincerity of purpose, in all we do in obedience to the voice of Revelation, is of far greater value in the sight of God, we may be assured, than a mere enthusiastic vehemence of feeling. To suppose that, in order to be truly pious Christians, we must be capable of being wrought into a mysterious fervour of devotion, is to destroy the universality of our

religion, as a light "lighting every man that cometh into the world<sup>a</sup>." No fact is more evident than that all men are not constituted alike, with respect to the liveliness or intensity of their feelings. And it is impossible, therefore, that that can be the essential constituent of a real faith—a faith intended for the use of all men,—for the spiritualization of the hearts of all men,—which some, from the very peculiarity of their nature, are precluded from enjoying. But if the existence of faith in the heart is ascertained by the elevation and excitement of the feelings, none can be among the faithful, who are not naturally endued with great acuteness and warmth of feeling. The religion of the true Christian is, indeed, a matter of feeling—of deep and strong feeling,—but it is not all feeling. There is a prudence in all its thoughts and actions, as well as a liveliness of emotion. We do it dishonour, when we behold it only in the raptures of the devotee, and forget that its spirit is no less seen in the simpli-

<sup>a</sup> John. i. 9.

city of the child, and the gravity of the mature in wisdom. Let us not, then, do the work of the Lord deceitfully, by polluting its purity, as a spiritual devotion of ourselves to God manifest in Christ, with the admixture of human imaginations. Let us not put strange incense on the proper altar of God in the heart.

Beware therefore, my Brethren, of encouraging in yourselves wild, unsubstantial views of religious truth. Love indeed the Word of Life,—love it ardently; but take it also into your hands, as a thing that must be *handled*, and *used*, and *applied*. Satisfy not yourselves with the feeling of piety, awakened by the inspiring truths of Christianity, however sincere you may know that feeling to be in yourselves; but descend with these truths into the business of those circumstances of the world, in which your trial and your danger are found. There it is, that your faith must appear “working by love.” You may find a real delight in lingering with affectionate devoutness in the high contemplations of God, which the doctrine of Christ Cruci-



He brings before you;—but resist this binding spell of a misguided piety;—be not enchained by it. Be the followers of Jesus, and not his admirers and lovers only. Look not only up to him as your Life and your Joy; but whilst you do so, go with him also to the scenes of public and domestic life,—sit with him in the assemblies of men,—behold him at your home,—visit with him the fatherless and afflicted;—take him as your companion and guide on your paths, to keep you “unspotted from the world.”

II. Next to having a right view of the nature of that work of the Lord to which, as Christians, we are called; it is important that we should rightly estimate the extent of the service to which it obliges us. We must execute our work to the utmost. However perfectly one part of it may be performed, if an essential part is omitted, we are still deceitful workers. Now the Christian's work consists of two parts; an outward and an inward service. We are called upon to serve God, not only with

the heart, but also by those outward ordinances of religion which he has appointed. It is not only necessary that we should love God in sincerity, but we must make corresponding profession of our love to him before the world. "As with the heart we believe, so with the mouth we confess unto salvation." Whilst the light of the Gospel burns vividly within us, we must "let it so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven." Christian faith manifests itself both by solemn worship in the assemblies of the Lord's house, and by daily conversation with men in social life. It is "not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ," but it owns the Gospel publicly. It has in view its own confirmation and improvement, by habitual exercise of itself on every proper occasion, as well as the edification of the world at large, by the force of its good example. He that would do the work of the Lord, accordingly, is careful to "fulfil all righteousness." He

<sup>1</sup> Rom. x. 10.<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 16.<sup>3</sup> Matt. iii. 15.

rejoices that when an infant he was pledged to Christ in baptism, devoutly relying on the invitation and promise and command of his Saviour, that grace has been imparted to him by the due administration of that sacrament. He is "glad when they say unto him, let us go into the house of the Lord"; assured by the declaration of Christ, that "where two or three are gathered together in his name there he is in the midst of them"; and obedient to the apostolic injunction, of "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together". He is also among those who "shew the Lord's death till he come"; by kneeling at the table of the Lord, and eating his flesh and drinking his blood in thankful remembrance of his death; confiding in the sacramental efficacy of the appointed emblems of bread and wine, as the spiritual food and sustenance of the soul. In all these ordinances of Christianity he faithfully participates, not

<sup>u</sup> Psalm cxxii. 1.

<sup>x</sup> Heb. x. 25.

<sup>v</sup> Matt. xviii. 20.

<sup>y</sup> 1 Cor. xi. 25.

anxiously questioning the *manner* of their beneficial operation, but thankfully doing what he has been commanded, and leaving it to God to accomplish the result\*.

In doing, moreover, the work of the Lord in its two leading divisions of an inward and an outward service, we must be

\* It would be well for the peace of the Church at large, as also for the individual Christian, if the sentiment of Hooker concerning the Lord's Supper were applied to the reception of both the sacraments: "What these elements are in themselves, it skilleth not; it is enough, that to me which take them they are the body and blood of Christ; his promise in witness hereof sufficeth; his word he knoweth which way to accomplish; *why should any cogitation possess the mind of a faithful communicant but this; O my God, thou art true; O my soul, thou art happy!*" The whole passage, commencing with the words, "Variety of judgments," &c. and concluding with the above, (Eccl. Pol. v. 67. vol. ii. p. 337—340. 8vo.) is not to be surpassed for strength of reasoning, and sublimity of pious eloquence. Let me recommend the study of it to every one, who would be a devout communicant; or who would escape the embarrassment of controversy on the doctrine of the sacraments.

careful not to omit any subordinate part in either. Both must be done *throughout*. It is not enough that the Christian has been baptized. He must follow up the profession which he has begun. He must grow in that grace in which he has been born again. He must nourish the immortal seed put into his soul, that it may expand and shoot up into a vigorous plant. He must be "instant in prayer," both public and private,—frequent in attendance at the Supper of the Lord,—or he will assuredly have received the initiatory grace of God in vain. He must lose no opportunity of glorifying God by word or by example; shewing himself "very jealous" for the honour of his Lord and Saviour. So again, in the inward service of the "work of the Lord," we must do *all the pleasure* of God. We are not permitted to *choose* what we will do, or what we will leave undone. We must love God entirely. Whilst we love him as our Redeemer, we must love him also as our Father and our Sanctifier. In accepting his proffered re-

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demption, we must accept also his law—his whole law. In acknowledging the gift of immortality, we must remember that the present life is a divine gift also, and that it must therefore be consecrated to the divine service—that it is part of an immortal duration, and must therefore partake of the character of immortality. In loving God, we must love our brother also.

III. The work of the Lord being done in its proper nature, and in its full extent; it yet remains to state to you, the manner in which it should be done. Let me impress on you, then, (what is implied indeed in the very nature of the work as the service of the heart,) the necessity of doing it diligently—unremittingly—fervently. Lukewarmness and indifference are powerful enemies to the faith, under the disguise of its friends. “I know thy works,” says “the faithful and true witness” to the church of the Laodiceans, “that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then, because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will

spue thee out of my mouth<sup>a</sup> ;” intimating, in strong language, the worthlessness and the danger of a cool and indifferent service of the Lord. Of those, who are yet altogether strangers to the faith of Christ, there is hope, that by the grace of God they may yet be converted and live. Their hearts have not been hardened by *trifling* with the Gospel-redemption. Of those, again, who are guilty of extravagance in their religious profession, there is hope, that mature experience, bringing with it a conviction of past error, may moderate the intemperateness of a burning zeal. Their failing is at least on the side of true religion. We must commend their principle of piety, whilst we reprobate the excess by which the principle is perverted. But of those, who are neither cold nor hot—who are content to proceed in an uniform course of insensibility—slumbering in the supineness of an established, unimproving piety,—there is no reasonable hope. Hardly will such be induced to think

<sup>a</sup> Rev. iii. 15, 16.



anything amiss of themselves, or be convinced that there is any necessity for a change in their mode of proceeding. While they survey themselves with conscious satisfaction, they know not how "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," they are—how utterly devoid of that zeal, which God demands of them in order to the execution of his work. If we bid such do the work of the Lord, they are ready to reply to us, 'that they are already doing it;'—call upon them to awake to righteousness, and they answer, 'that the call is not needful to them, for they are not among the sleepers;'—exhort them to stir up the grace that is in them, they appeal to their regular lives, their goodness of heart, their veneration of the Gospel, their frequent prayers. 'Our call and exhortation are not appropriate to them—we must look elsewhere for such as need the exertions which we prescribe for them.' Thus exempting themselves from the admonitions of the Gospel, they will listen with composure to the most forcible appeals—nay they will express



their admiration of, and concurrence in, the strongest language of exhortation which the Christian minister may address to his flock ; for the utmost that he can say is not applicable, they think, to their case ; and it is but a part of their inactive religion, to admire, and concur in, the excellence and cogency of its precepts. How desperate then is the case of such persons !

If, indeed, the work of the Lord could be done in any way ;—if it were enough that it be done, and it mattered not that it be done *well* ;—then might the lukewarm religionist claim his station among the legitimate professors of the faith. But whereas, on the contrary, the work done in the service of the Lord is of no value at all in his sight, unless it be done with a zeal proportionate to its importance ;—the love which we profess to him, is no love at all unless it be fervent ; the Christian who has done the work of the Lord indifferently, has done it deceitfully—deceitfully towards himself, for he feels a dangerous satisfaction in his state, from which he will

scarcely be diverted—deceitfully towards God, for he pretends to give his heart which he has not given.

The Christian religion, indeed, being a continual progress,—its very excellence consisting in its tendency to improvement,—nothing is more repugnant to it than an indifference which permits us to acquiesce in our present attainments. As there is no point at which we can say that we have reached the perfection of the Christian;—for we must be “perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect;”—we must conclude, that the only excellence of our present religious condition is the promise which it gives of ulterior advancement;—in short, that the Christian is not to be estimated, from *what he is absolutely at* any specific period, but from *what he is in relation to that perfection of holiness which is the end of his exertions*. But a lukewarm profession of Christianity has no reference to such an ultimate end;—it indicates no tendency towards a more per-

fect state;—it has its consummation in itself;—and it is quite opposite, therefore, to that progressive holiness, which is the characteristic of true religion.

Unhappily however, lukewarmness—this fatal opiate of the life of God in the soul of man—is a state of religion—of irreligion. I should rather say—but too prevalent amongst us. It is the expedient adopted by all such as are desirous of avoiding the imputation of rejecting the Gospel, and the labour of accepting it. It is the cheap substitute for an exact piety—the indolent compensation for the want of a religion wrought into the character by assiduous cultivation. Such a profession of Christianity is the bane of times of peaceful security, such as those with which the Church is now blessed. When the faith is no longer forcibly assailed from without by the fire of persecution,—and our zeal is not forcibly stirred by counteraction,—we are apt to remit our vigilance and to slumber at our post. In the absence of foreign incursion, we forget the domestic enemy, which lurks within

us—seated in our own bosoms, and ready there to overthrow and destroy the altar of God. Hence it is that, among the vast body of professing Christians which the aspect of the religious world presents, the true believers may still be described, in the terms applied to them in their insulated state at the infancy of the Gospel—as a “*little flock*”<sup>b</sup>. Against this seductive influence of a state of security, let us, my Brethren, keep the strictest watch over ourselves. Let us guard against the lethargy of indifference, as against a sleep from which there is no awakening.

Whilst, moreover, “the work of the Lord” must be done diligently and fervently,—it behoves us at the same time to examine into the character of our zeal, lest our very activity as Christians be a snare to us. There may be a forwardness and energy displayed in our Christian calling, whilst Christ Crucified is but a subordinate object of our exertions. Christian

<sup>b</sup> Luke xii. 32.

actions may be done, with little, if any; Christian benefit to the individual who does them; unless the honour and glory of God through Christ are their ultimate aim. Some there are, who seem to be zealously engaged in the work of the Lord, whilst in fact they are unprofitably "cumbered with much serving;" neglecting the "one thing needful" in their service,—the entire devotion of themselves to God their Saviour. Such are they, who are actuated by party-spirit in their zeal for Christ—who are "of Paul," or "of Apollos," or "of Cephas," rather than of Christ—or who act from motives of self-importance, or self-interest—or who in any way make their religion a worldly concern, rather than an interest immediately between God and their own souls. We may, indeed, unite other motives, good in themselves, with the motive of glory to God; but they must be such as admit of being included in that great and *proper* Christian motive. For instance, love to the

\* See 1 Cor. i. 12. iii.

particular Church to which we belong, as to the parent that has nursed and trained us in the faith, may be a lawful constituent of our zeal;—only this our filial attachment must be “in the Lord.” We must act from such a love of our Church, as is founded on a conviction of its scriptural authority, and its reference to Christ, as the best instrument of promoting the salvation of the world through his merits. Unless our zeal be thus animated and directed, we are doing the work of the Lord deceitfully;—we are “spending our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not<sup>e</sup>;”—we are but doing our own business, and not the Lord’s.

Our application of the warning of the ancient Prophet to our case, as the Israel of Christ appointed to a work of the Lord, has led us to observe the spiritual nature of our religion as consisting in the love of God,—our obligation to serve God both

<sup>e</sup> Isaiah lv. 2.

with public profession of our faith and with inward devotion of ourselves—and the necessity which is laid upon us of diligence and fervency in the discharge of that obligation.

In addressing these observations to you, my Brethren, I have presumed, that you are persons already convinced that you have a “work of the Lord” to do ;—that you are anxious to do that work according to his will. I trust, indeed, that you are amongst those to whose consciences the question is often recurring—“ what shall I do to inherit eternal life ?”—and who will, therefore, gladly receive, what a fellow-labourer in the same important work may suggest, to assist you in performing it. If such be the case with you,—you are not among the self-sufficient despisers of counsel :—you are fearful of yourselves even in your best actions, lest you should be deceiving yourselves, by only *seeming* to do the work of the Lord and not *doing* it. Conscious that you love God, as the God of the Christian Faith, you are

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yet dissatisfied with your degree of affection towards him, and anxious to love him more. Seeking to serve him with the lips and with the heart, you feel that your voice of praise is cold, and inadequate to express the value of the blessing with which he has blessed you. Fervent as you know yourselves to have been in doing the work of the Lord, you yet "count not yourselves to have apprehended," but are sensible, that your zeal wants quickening—that it wants purifying—that it has not the savour of holiness—the odour of the unction of the Spirit.—Take then the words of the text as your warning and encouragement to perseverance. You are at a point in your religion at which you cannot stop. The work of the Lord is an incessant one. If intermitted for a moment it retrogrades. You deceive yourselves, if you think the past sufficient, or that your work will abide if suffered to stand still. If it be indeed the work of the Lord in which you are occupied, it will grow under your hands. Take heed, therefore, having laid the good foundation, how you



“build thereupon.” See that your work be such as will abide. For the day will come, when “every man’s work shall be made manifest;” and be “tried of what sort it is,” before he shall “receive his reward<sup>f</sup>.” “Behold I come quickly,” says our Saviour by his Spirit; “and my reward is with me, to give every man *according as his work shall be*<sup>g</sup>.”

<sup>f</sup> See 1 Cor. iii. 10—15.

<sup>g</sup> Rev. xxii. 12.

## SERMON VII.

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### THE LORD PLEADING WITH HIS PEOPLE.

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DEUT. v. 28.

And the Lord heard the voice of your words, when ye spake unto me; and the Lord said unto me; I have heard the voice of the words of this people which they have spoken unto thee; they have well said all that they have spoken: O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them and with their children for ever.

THE book of Deuteronomy, from which the text is taken, is perhaps, as a whole, the most affecting and interesting of the whole volume of the Old Testament. It is a recapitulation of the wonderful providences of God towards his chosen people, by one who had held the principal part in the dispensation of those providences, and whose heart deeply felt the truths which his

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tongue delivered. It is at once the authoritative declaration of a messenger of God,—the benediction of a saint;—and the pathetic bequest of admonition from a dying friend. It seems to have been intended by Moses, to enforce the lessons conveyed in his former books; and to leave the due impression on the minds of the Israelites, of those extraordinary events, by which their history had been signalized. If, from the evidences of Almighty power displayed in their behalf, the people had been led to form a notion of the Lord God, simply as an arbitrary, powerful Being, ruling the kingdoms of the earth by an irresistible sovereignty;—the tenour of this valedictory code of instruction is such, as to have corrected and modified so partial a view of the Divine Majesty;—by animated representations of the loving-kindness and gentleness of their heavenly King, as a God who pleaded with his people in “a still small voice,” as well as One who could awe them into obedience by the voice of his thunder.

In unison with this tenour of the book,

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is the particular passage of it now before us. It pathetically describes the Almighty God as a God, not to be feared only for the terror of his power, but for the great condescension of his love. It represents him as receiving favourably the protestations of devout reverence made by his people, and declaring a vehement solicitude for their continuance in that piety which they had professed;—not for his own name's sake—not for his glory among the nations of the world—but “that it might be well with them and with their children for ever.”

The principal thing accordingly to be noticed in this passage is, the tender interest which it represents to us as felt by God concerning the creatures of his hand. The words indeed are spoken principally of persons, who had experienced singular proofs of the Divine interest, beyond every other people of the earth; but the sentiment conveyed in them is one of universal import. They are spoken of the Israelites, not as *Israelites* only, but

as men. We hear in them the Giver of a revelation pleading with those to whom he had revealed himself. When transferred, accordingly, to Christians, they are the sentiments of the Lord of the Gospel addressed to the subjects of the Gospel. But there is this to be observed, that, in applying this appeal to the case of Christians, the words—"O that there were such an heart in them that they would fear me"—acquire a still more tender character, than that which belongs to them in their primary application. For to the Christian Family, the very miracles wrought in their behalf, are miracles of *love*. All the events by which their redemption was effected, from that more than Egyptian bondage under which they were oppressed,—the bondage of death and sin,—were indications of gentleness and mercy in the God who brought them forth out of the land of their captivity. To us God has appeared as an affable Deity. We have not been obliged to turn away our eyes from a terrific presentation of his Majesty, "lest we should die." By the Incarnation, he has "drawn" us to-

wards him, with “the cords of a man, with bands of love.” We have no prejudices to correct, arising from the natural impression of awful spectacles of the Divine power. The evidences of the Divine power to us, are transcended by those of the Divine goodness. How eloquently then must God plead to our hearts,—to the hearts of all who profess a faith in the Gospel-Redemption!—“I have heard the voice of the words of this people: they have well said all that they have spoken; O that there were such an heart in them, that they would keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.”

The consideration of the tender anxiety of God displayed in this passage of Scripture, will lead us to a forcible idea of the nature of that religion, which is both well pleasing to God, and answerable to his providential interest in our behalf.

Conceive then the thoughtfulness of an affectionate Parent for the child of his

bosom. What cares are felt by such an one for his tender charge! How earnest is the wish—how fervently breathed is the prayer,—that, when grown to maturity, the man may fulfil the promise of the child!—that, during his progress in the days of his youth, no snares of the world may entrap his footsteps, and no untoward accident thwart his path—that treasuring up the good with which his infant mind has been imbued, and keeping all the divine commandments always, he may be dear to God and respected among men,—and it may be well with him for ever. Just so our Father in heaven cares for us. Just so is he ever interested for his sons—his beloved in Christ. Just so, does he regard us,—now that he claims us as his own indeed,—now that we have been, as it were, domesticated with him and brought up at his table, by the Son of his love,—as his “little ones,” sent forth from the paternal wing into a world of temptations and of sorrow. Such is the interest with which he watches our progress from our infancy in the faith, to the period which closes our

labour and our trial,—striving by his Spirit to guard us unharmed amidst the scenes of our daily occupation,—to keep us steadfast in our allegiance to himself, that it may “be well” with us—*well* with us, in a sense which it hath not entered into the heart of man to conceive,—“for ever.”

You then who, as parents, have yourselves experienced parental cares—judge what a Father you have in heaven. You who as children, have been the objects of tender love to an earthly parent,—judge how you are regarded by him, whose children you are in the fullest sense of the term. But it is not sufficient for you, merely to be sensible of the carefulness of your heavenly Father. Judge at the same time, how you ought to love that God who is so tenderly watching over you :—judge how you ought to requite his loving-kindness :—how you should second his cares for you ;—how scrupulously you should guard against rendering them ineffectual—against converting his vigilance into a vain waking for you—by any negligence on your own part in regard to your



welfare, or by wilfully casting yourselves into difficulties, from which he is ever "holding up your goings," so far as care from him can *alone* avail.

But this is not the whole view of the case. The interest felt in our behalf by our Father in heaven, is not fully estimated, unless we conceive it as that intense feeling of anxiety, which is awakened by a consciousness of uncertainty in any object near to our heart. When we consider the omniscience of God, we may be induced to think, that there can be no such ingredient in the interest which he feels for us, as anxiety. He must know the issue of all things, as well as the means which are tending to their accomplishment during their progress. And, therefore, we may conclude, that he cannot really be anxious in such a way, as would imply an uncertainty in his knowledge of the final issue of our present conduct. But here we should deceive ourselves. True it is, indeed, that with God is no imperfection of knowledge, as there is no imperfection in

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any other of his attributes.—But because his knowledge is perfect, we are not to conclude, that he *must act* in his dealings towards us *as if it were so*. He may nevertheless treat us as if he were uncertain as to the result. And his *enduing* us with a responsible nature shews, that he does treat us in the last manner—that, as he has formed us to act upon the deliberate choice of our own judgment, so *he will in fact* suspend his judgment over us, until he has *proved us*—until we have had opportunity of manifesting our character, and enabled him to see, by actual experiment of us, the course which we will pursue—until we have shewn, whether we will “do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with <sup>a</sup>” him, *in order to* our obtaining his blessing. Hence he may be truly regarded—(truly I say; inas-much as, it is the only practical view of the divine dealings; and there must be a fault somewhere in any view of God, which is not of practical application to

<sup>a</sup> Micah vi. 8.

the life of man;)—as looking forward with a lively concern to our behaviour in the world—with all that concern indeed, which is excited in our minds by a real uncertainty as to the result of our behaviour.

Consider then, further, that uneasiness of spirit which a parent feels in his uncertainty about the future conduct and happiness of his child:—think of the days of thoughtful care—the nights of restlessness—which he must pass, who knows that his child is going forth into the midst of dangers, which he may not have the prudence or the resoluteness to encounter successfully; besides being exposed to those evils, which visit indiscriminately the good and the bad, and which no prudence or resoluteness can avert—"the arrow that flieth by day, and the pestilence that walketh in darkness." Then recollect, that your Father in heaven is no less anxiously interested about your conduct and happiness—think of him, as in like manner caring abundantly for you—as anticipating with grief the dreadful possibility of your downfall and ruin, and looking forward with joy to the

period, when your probation shall be completed, and your happiness *secured* to you for ever. And, knowing that you have such a God over you, be convinced of the great sin of "grieving his Holy Spirit." Every wrong step that you make in your Christian course, grieves the heart of God. Every forgetfulness of that great love wherewith he loved us, in redeeming us, and adopting us as sons in Christ, is a vexation of his Spirit. With what holy anxiety then,—with what trembling earnestness,—should we watch ourselves, that we be not, as tears in the eye of our compassionate Father in heaven.

"O then my Brethren, "that there were such an heart in us, that we would fear the Lord"—that we would *love* the Lord, let me rather say, as addressing myself to a congregation of Christians—"and keep all his commandments always!" O that we would learn, in this our day of grace, "the things which belong unto our peace"—that we would cordially receive the message of salvation which God has

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sent to us by his Son—that we would obey the call to active duty which the reception of that message imports—that we would not only “from this time cry unto God, my Father, thou art the guide of my youth<sup>b</sup>,” but would immediately “*arise and go*” to him, and diligently *do* the work to which he has appointed us!

By coming to God through the grace of baptism—by partaking of the spiritual food of Christ’s body and blood—by assembling yourselves in the house of prayer—by hearing and reading the Scriptures—by giving heed to instruction and exhortation in the Faith—by openly declaring the creed which you have received—and speaking the praises of the Gospel—you profess yourselves, like the Israelites of old, willing to hear “all that the Lord your God shall speak” unto you, and to “do it.” So far God has heard your voice—so far you “have well said all that you have spoken.” But is there also that heart in you, which he desires for the

<sup>b</sup> Jer. iii. 4.

Israelites in this passage of his Revelation, —the heart to realize the vows and professions which you have made ?—or are you resting on your verbal zeal for the Gospel ; and suffering your religion to spend its strength, and to evaporate, in mere protestation of your love and reverence towards its Divine Author and Giver ?

Let me point out to you, by some instances, the method of rendering your religious professions—those principles of belief which you conscientiously hold—motives to conduct ;—of mutually converting your sentiments of piety into acts of virtue, and your acts of virtue into sentiments of piety ;—or rather, of exhibiting the faith and works of the Christian in their proper identity with each other.

1. Are you then sincere believers in the Atonement of the Gospel ?—You are doing the work of Atonement. Your heart is with the heart of God. You have contemplated him, manifesting his utter abhorrence of sin—as one who will “by no means

clear the guilty"—but at the same time, as providing a sacrifice for sin, and giving the sinner the means of attaining that happiness, to which his unassisted nature could not attain. Your actions accordingly are those of *the sinner saved*. You fly from sin as from your pest and ruin—as that which by its own nature must certainly bring you to everlasting punishment. You endeavour therefore to purify yourselves to the utmost of your power. You do your utmost to walk in all the commandments of the Lord, blameless. But at the same time, you are placing no reliance on your own righteousness ; you are acting in entire dependence on the means provided for your restoration to divine favour. Otherwise, you do but disown your profession. A self-righteous action is not one, in which the principle of Atonement is maintained. An impure action is not one, on which the Divine hostility to sin, evidenced in that doctrine, is engraved. An indolent action is not one, in which the Divine Exertion in our behalf, also evidenced in that doctrine, has its corresponding impress.

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2. Are you sincere believers in the doctrine of Sanctification by the Spirit?—You are sanctified in every good word and work. You have contemplated God, as the Helper of your infirmities, the Giver of a new life. Can you be looking to him for help, when you are not helping yourselves? Can you be looking to him for life, when you are daily dying in trespasses and sins. Can you be depending on him to give the increase, when you are neither tilling nor planting the field from which the harvest is to spring? When Saint Paul confessed of himself,—“ by the grace of God I am what I am;”—he made a true confession, because all his actions savoured of the Divine grace. He laboured, to keep his body in subjection—to have a conscience void of offence towards God and towards man;—he pressed towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Knowing then how anxiously he had sought holiness—with what pains he had discharged his duties as



a disciple and Apostle of Christ—he could from his heart say,—“by the grace of God I am what I am.” But how can any one honestly declare the same truth as his own personal conviction, who knows quite the contrary of himself—that he is such an one, in his actions with whom the Holy Spirit cannot dwell. He may indeed acknowledge the truth generally. He may be a professor of a system of doctrines in which this particular doctrine enters. But as to any personal acceptance of the truth—which is the point at issue when a man’s real religion is looked into—he is as one, who has never “heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” The grace on which we heartily rely, speaks from the actions which it sanctifies. A real dependence in sentiment on God, turns our conduct towards the Holy Being whom we believe to be our Life,—giving it a tendency towards that sanctification, on which it ultimately depends for all its excellence.

3. Once more,—Are you sincere believers in the doctrine of a Future State,—a

state of eternal existence after death ? Can you then suffer all your actions to have their end in this present life alone ? Can any one who really considers himself as an heir of immortality, be mortal in every thing that he does ? It cannot be supposed. The whole life of a man, in whom is the blessed hope of a resurrection, is a rising up from the death to which sin has brought him. He does nothing, so far as his frailty permits, inconsistent with that hope.—For what is the case in the present life alone ? Does the husbandman, who believes in the succession of the seasons, act as if no other season but that which is present to him were to be expected ? In harvest time does he expend all the produce of his land in the purposes of subsistence, as if he had no expectation of a day when the furrow would open to receive the seed of a future crop ? Or in seed-time does he neglect to sow, as if there were no hope of the summer sun, and of the rains and dews of heaven, to bring the grain to maturity. On the contrary, we find him diligently committing his

seed to the ground at one season of the year, with a view to the increase to be obtained at another ;—and again, reserving of the produce of the harvest, with a view to the recurrence of seed-time. Thus he is constantly *acting* on a principle of *dependence on the future*. All his present actions have a prospective character. The reason of them does not appear, if we confine our attention to what is simply present in them. To explain them, we must take into our account some future period to which they relate.—So it is with the labourer in the Lord's vineyard. All his actions are incomplete, if simply viewed by the light of the present life. There is no satisfactory reason to be assigned for them, if we exclude the notion of an immortal duration consequent on the present period. But by admitting this belief, they appear natural and consistent. The agency of this belief is the principle which gives the proper solution of them :—as on the other hand, the absence of such a belief would be shewn, by the temporary and self-complete actions of the man, who only

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*professes* himself the disciple of Christianity, and does no more.

These instances may suffice to shew, how you are to proceed in applying other doctrines of Christianity to a practical use; and, in general, how you may realize your profession of faith, in a manner answerable to the divine interest in your behalf; making your own actions the living page, in which the Scripture truths may be read by every passing eye.

To this active religion, I observe, in conclusion, the blessedness described in the text is expressly attached. The Lord is anxious that his people should “fear him, and keep all his commandments always, *that* it might be well with them, and with their children for ever.” It is that religion which we must possess *in order to* our everlasting happiness. Israel could not prosper as a temporal state, unless she obeyed the Lord who had chosen her; neither can God’s chosen in Christ inherit eternal life, unless they are obedient to the

Lord who has called them to himself.<sup>d</sup> An active religion is in fact the beginning of that blessedness to which it is subservient. In the righteousness of Israel consisted the immediate prosperity of her people, as well as her perpetuity among

<sup>d</sup> One great cause of the perversion of the words—Elect and Chosen—to a Calvinistic sense, seems to be, an inattention to the different circumstances of the Jewish and Christian Churches. The Jewish church was established for a particular purpose—inasmuch as it was subordinate and instrumental to the Christian. It was the making of Abraham a great nation, in order that in Abraham “all families of the earth might be blessed.” Israel accordingly was chosen *out of* mankind. In this case it might well be said—“Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated”—for by such a form of expression, (according to the idiom of the Hebrew language, which delights in such antitheses,) the *peculiarity of selection* is strongly marked. But the Christian Church, as including “all the families of the earth,” cannot be understood to be elect, in the same manner as the Jewish. Here, electing, and choosing, cannot imply *selection*, or *rejection*. They simply characterize the graciousness of the Divine dealings towards mankind through Christ, by a forcible description of them, transferred from the history of the Divine dealings towards the peculiar people of the Jewish Church.

the kingdoms of the earth. Her obedience to God was not only a security against her enemies, but it produced at the moment "peace within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces." So in the present righteousness of the Christian Church is the earnest of Christian immortality. "Verily I say unto you," is the promise of our Saviour, "there is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting \*." If we be, indeed, heirs of eternal salvation, we shall be actively pursuing the religion of the Gospel; and, in this pursuit, shall be engaged in actions, which render us happy even *now*—whose present and immediate blessing is, "manifold more" than the personal labour and trouble which they may exact of us. But something must be left—something must be sacrificed—something must really be done by us in our capacity as Christians;—to perceive

\* Luke xviii. 29, 30.

this compensatory tendency of our religion—to know, whether we are “in the way that leadeth unto life.” And the reason of this is apparent. For, from what were we redeemed by Christ? Was it from death only? Was it not rather from iniquity also—from sin, the sting of death? He “gave himself for us,” says the Apostle, “that he might redeem us *from all iniquity*, and *purify* unto himself a peculiar people *zealous of good works*†.” If we are redeemed, therefore, we are shewing signs of the life to which we are redeemed. The blessing of the redemption is beginning to descend upon us; as we co-operate with its gracious purpose, by actively resisting the assaults of iniquity, and purifying ourselves. Let us only go on in that blessed work, and we may trust, that we shall be redeemed “for ever.”

† Titus ii. 14.

## SERMON VIII.

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### LOOKING BACK FROM THE GOSPEL.

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LUKE ix. 62.

Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

It is among the practical excellences of the Gospel, that it not only proposes to us everlasting life, as the object of our pursuit, and reveals to us the means of attaining that life,—but it also directs our observation to certain points in the character of its disciples, by which they may surely judge of their spiritual condition. It both tells us what sort of persons those are who are in the way of salvation, and depicts to us in fearful colours the characteristics of those who have no part in its blessing. And as it is most



important to us to know, whether we have indeed any hope of the immortality brought to light by Jesus Christ:—for, with a sincere intention of choosing the only right way, we may be unawares pursuing a very devious course;—so the Gospel is chiefly intent on enumerating the qualities which mark the inefficient candidate for the kingdom of God.—It belongs not indeed to the most advanced Christian—to him whose character most closely resembles the portrait of an heir of immortality—positively to determine his own fitness for heaven. Such an assurance would little accord with that humility of soul, and that unceasing vigilance, required of the disciple of Christ. This may be a reason why the Scriptures have not been so explicit, in giving the marks of a state of acceptance with God, as in guarding the Christian against a mistaken confidence in himself.—Thus we find particular sins mentioned, with the warning annexed, that they who “do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” And thus also, those who

are *apparently* doing much in their Christian calling,—whilst *in reality* they are doing *nothing*,—are sketched to the life, in their various shades of imperfection, by the impartial pencil of Scripture; and enabled by candid comparison of themselves with their portrait there before them, to discover their delusion and their danger.

Of this last-mentioned description, is the passage contained in the text. “No man,” it says, “having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” He, who has put his hand to the plough;—that is, he who having renounced the world—the scene of his past unfruitfulness and spiritual death,—has professed the Gospel of Christ, pledging himself to the service and glory of God;—must no longer have any thoughts of that world which he has left. If he looks back from his work—if he forgets for a moment the paramount importance—the pressing demand on his whole attention—of the engagement that he has taken on him, he disqualifies himself for

the execution of it,—he is remote from the attainment of the end which he has in view.

The occasion on which the words of the text were spoken, must be consulted, in order to the right perception of the instruction conveyed in them.

In the verses immediately preceding the text, we read of persons, who came forward with a shew of zeal, and volunteered their services to Jesus. But when Jesus accepted them as disciples, and bad them follow him, we find, that each had some pretence to offer in excuse for not immediately complying with the injunction. The zeal which appeared so prompt—which, in the moment before was ready to forsake all and follow the Lord—recoiled, so soon as its heartiness was brought to the test of an unconditional compliance. One appears to have been discouraged, by the hardihood of the life which he must lead, as the devoted companion of a houseless Master : for, when Jesus told him ;—“ foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his

head ;"—we do not find that he persisted in his desire. The Evangelist indeed reports no objection on the part of this person ; but his silence gives us reason to infer, that this case was among those which led to the remark of the text.

Another person, in answer to the express invitation of Jesus, shews his hesitation, by requesting permission, "first to go and bury his father." To him Jesus answers ;—"let the dead bury their dead ; but go thou and preach the kingdom of God." The reply of our Lord was in appearance harsh : but in fact, it was nothing more than a strong appeal to the heart of one who shewed a disposition to be his disciple. Let us suppose that the plea was a real one,—that this candidate for discipleship had left a house of mourning, and wished to return once more to pay the last respect to a deceased parent. Jesus did not sanction by his reply the neglect of this filial duty. But, knowing the hearts of all men, he knew that the duty so urged, was intended as a plea, to excuse the real irresolution couched under an appearance of

zeal—and he wished to impress on the mind of his follower, the *paramount importance* of that spiritual duty involved in the act of following him. “The dead” might “bury their dead:”—those who had not been quickened to a sense of their Christian calling might lawfully pursue other duties:—but he that professed himself alive to the call of the Gospel, could no longer make any other claim, however binding on him, a ground of postponing that superlative interest.

The last person mentioned said; “Lord I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house.” He, like the others, was ready to follow Jesus, until he was actually called upon to do so. Yet he does not retract his profession. But, as not prepared to enter on it at once, he urges something else to be done first; whereby he might both retain the credit of an earnest disciple, and delay the prosecution of his spiritual task. He is taken by surprise, when he finds to what he has pledged himself. To instruct him, therefore, and the world at

large, what it is to be a disciple of the Gospel;—and that no one who comes to him, unprepared to go *at once* whithersoever he leads the way, really *comes* to him at all;—Jesus makes the remark of the text—“no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God,” using a proverbial mode of expression, probably suggested to him, from the circumstance of Elisha having been called from the plough to the office of a Prophet—on which occasion, he made a similar excuse to that urged by the last of the three individuals here described\*.

It appears, accordingly, from the account of the different persons here alluded to by our Lord, that we may be said, to have put our hand to the plough, and to look back:—1, when having commenced the pursuit of our religion in earnest, we immediately afterwards slacken our endeavours, and do not follow up with spirit what we have begun with spirit:—

\* See 1 Kings xix. 19—21.

or 2, when we prefer any thing, even an important duty, to our religion itself:—or, 3, when we purpose to become religious characters, but defer being so to a future occasion:—or, 4, when we endeavour to combine the world with our religion, and to be the disciples of Christ, only so far, as we may not offend the world, or deprive ourselves of its advantages. The separate consideration of each of these points, will further unfold to you the application of the warning conveyed in the text.

I. First, let us look to the circumstance of commencing our religion in earnest, and omitting to carry forward a like spirit into our subsequent conduct.—It is easy enough to begin any thing with spirit:—the very novelty of an undertaking allures and stimulates the thoughtless and irresolute. The difficulty, and the trial, consist in the continuance of the like exertions. A *single* effort may suffice for a spirited beginning: *a series of* efforts is indispensable for the prosecution of it. Forwardness and alacrity, though joined with

an unstable temper, may accomplish the former—but the latter requires, together with these qualities, steadiness, and patience, and perseverance. Hence it is, that many persons, like the individuals alluded to in the text, are ready enough to enlist themselves under the banners of Christ, as the Captain of their salvation—to plead their trust in his merits, and to say—“ Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest ;” but let them only be called upon to go forth to fight the battles of the Lord,—to act upon that trust in his merits which they plead,—really to take up their cross and go after him by that way which he is gone before them:—they are not *prepared* to advance a step:—the fire of their zeal is spent, as it were, at its first blazing out;—they have not calculated the quantity of exertion required of them, and have done *their all*, when they have made their *profession* of Christianity. But how opposite is such a behaviour to the very terms of our entrance upon Christianity! For what is it, to become a Christian, but to pledge oneself to a certain mode of life—to a



certain system of action, consistent with itself throughout, and animated by an invariable zeal. The mere profession of Christianity is an engagement *to do a great deal*. It is not only saying, or shewing by certain formal acts, that we belong to a particular party of men holding certain opinions. It is an engagement to be, such as Christ was—to “follow his example and to be made like to him,—that as he died and rose again for us, so will we who are his disciples, die from sin, and rise again unto righteousness, continually mortifying all our evil and corrupt affections, and daily proceeding in all virtue, and godliness of living.” Those therefore, who go no further, than merely to tender their services to Christ—who are only his, so long as they are not tried—are not *his* at all. They may belong to him, as he is the founder of a religion established in the world: but they belong not to him, *as he is the Christ*—the Saviour of the world,—the Saviour *of themselves*. If they were really his, they would “*abide in him*,” and he would be found “abiding

in them<sup>b</sup>;" they would so embrace and cherish the gospel, that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, would be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus their Lord<sup>c</sup>." Their efforts, instead of slackening after the first exertion, would gain strength and ease. Instead of hesitating in silence,—or devising some plea to excuse them from immediate compliance, when summoned by their Lord to follow him,—they are already on the way when the word sounds in their ears; and the invitation of their Lord is welcomed by them, as the voice of an encouraging friend and helper. Does he, by some trying circumstances of the world, propose to them the inquiry, which he did with such affectionate importunity to the zealous Peter—"lovest thou me?"—they are ready to demonstrate by their actions the sincerity of their love; and to confess, by those in-

<sup>b</sup> John xv. 4.

<sup>c</sup> Rom. viii. 38.

fallible signs, the good confession—"yea Lord, thou knowest that I love thee<sup>d</sup>."

II. Next, let us look to that circumstance in the conduct of the persons condemned in the text—their preferring other duties to the all-important one of embracing the Gospel. This is a very common and dangerous delusion, by which men evade their religious obligations. They will not risk the infamy, or the self-reproach, of openly renouncing the Faith. They will not allow it to be supposed, that they *never* intend to be as diligent and exact in obeying the call of the Gospel, as their most religious neighbours may be:—but they (they will have us believe,) have something else to do which must *first be done*—they must first "bury a father," or they must "go and bid them farewell which are at home"—that is, they are anxious only first to fulfil some other duty which solicits their attention; and *then* they will be ready to do their utmost "for the kingdom of God's sake." Observe for instance, how plausibly some

<sup>d</sup> John xxi. 15.

persons will discourse of the claims of the Gospel:—they will tell you how excellent it is;—how much they admire the wisdom of those who strictly follow it as their rule of life:—and they will lead you to suppose, that *they* are of the number of those whose conduct they so much approve. But let us only descend to particulars with them:—let us question them as to this religious duty or that:—let us ask them, for instance, whether they are frequenters of the holy Communion;—and what is the answer we obtain?—‘they are sorry to own, either that they have never attended that sacred ordinance, or that they have not been so frequent in attendance on it, as they could wish they had been:—but their cares, they will say,—their business in various ways,—or the burden of a family at home demanding their personal attention,—or their scruples at coming, before they have formally reconciled themselves to some one with whom they have quarrelled, or before they have had what they consider sufficient leisure for preparation—have hitherto prevented them.’ What

is this in effect but to make their duty to Christ a secondary consideration? They would follow their Lord whithersoever he invites them; but he must wait their convenience:—when they have *first* done something else which they think necessary to be done *first*, they will *then* be amongst the foremost of his followers. Now, the point which I wish you to observe particularly here is, that such persons deceive themselves, by putting forward, as a plea, their anxiety to do what is *right*. The duties upon which they rest their defence, are certainly what they ought not to leave undone,—but these duties must not be urged as a bar against the performance of indispensable religious obligations. The goodness of one action is no justification for the omission of another, which we are required to do on the instant. Thus, though it was a good action in the disciple of our Lord, to perform the last duties of affectionate respect to a deceased parent, yet it was no excuse to him, for not implicitly obeying an injunction from Christ to follow him. Neither will it be any

excuse to any of us, that we neglected the immediate concerns of the kingdom of God out of a scrupulous regard to some other considerations, however important and right. Christ must have our absolute, undivided preference. What he says, must be done by us forthwith, *at all hazards*. Indeed, in promptly fulfilling his commands with an unquestioning obedience, as the first claims on our attention, we shall find that we secure *every* point of duty.

III. The circumstance of *delay* is one also adverted to in the censure expressed in the text; and this now comes to be considered. The persons addressed by our Lord delayed to follow him. They seemed willing to follow him, but they put off the act to a more convenient season. Having put their hand to the plough, they did not press on, but looked back—intending, as it would seem, presently to resume the task which they had undertaken. Now the religion of the Christian is a thing which admits of no delay. It is the dedication, the giving up, of the whole life to

God. No moment, consequently, that is taken from the business of our religion for any other purpose, can ever be regained. For *the whole life* is the least that is due to God; and is the least that he requires of us:—and we have no *spare* time, therefore, by which past deficiencies may be filled up. The delaying Christian has, accordingly, no just sense of the immense importance of his time, in each of its several portions, in order to the salvation of his soul. It signifies nothing that he *intends* at some future opportunity to give himself up to God;—for the intention can never be accomplished. So long as he looks back, though his hand be rested on the plough, some of his work remains undone: he voluntarily withdraws a *part* of that service which he has promised to give entire; and thus by his action falsifies his intention, and prevents its being ever *fully* realized. —Beware, therefore, of flattering yourselves, with the plea of your good intentions of *becoming* active Christians. If you are not so *at once*, tremble to think that you are not fit for the kingdom of God.

IV. The last circumstance to which I adverted, as included in the warning of the text, was, an attempt to unite a regard for the world with a regard for the Gospel—to hold to your faith in Christ in such a way, as not to let go your hold on the things of the world. This sort of compromise is, what is elsewhere denoted by our Lord, as serving two masters—God and Mammon,—a joint service, which he declares to be impossible. But though his infallible word has declared its impossibility, how frequently is the absurd and wicked attempt made amongst us? Have not most of us some thoughts which we still reserve for the world, even whilst we are professing to give *all* to God?—in some measure, not unlike Ananias and Sapphira<sup>e</sup>, keeping back part of the very treasure, which we profess to have surrendered up and devoted to God. Or, are not many of us like the first Samaritans, half-heathens, half-worshippers of the true God—“fearing the Lord, yet serving

<sup>e</sup> Acts v. 2.



graven images<sup>f</sup>." We are not among the despisers and scoffers. The respect which we shew to Christ's Gospel, is sincere, so far as it goes : we really wish to be his faithful disciples. But we are at the same time not thoroughly pledged to take up our cross—to deny ourselves, and to follow him. We consent to take his yoke upon us so far as *we may make it* an easy yoke to us—to bear his burden so far as *we may make it* light to us—unhappily forgetting, that the yoke and the burden of Christ are only easy and light, when they are submitted to with "the whole spirit, soul and body." We do not say with him in that prophetic exclamation of David ; "I delight to do thy will, O my God!—yea thy law is within my heart<sup>g</sup>." But we introduce glosses of our own will into the charter of the Gospel. We claim exemptions and privileges ; and flatter ourselves with the fond presumption, that we may in some respects do our own pleasure also. We obey only so

<sup>f</sup> 2 Kings xvii. 33—41.

<sup>g</sup> Psalm xl. 8.

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far as obedience does not clash with our own humours and inclinations. However we may shrink from the thought when nakedly stated in words,—practically we think, that God will be satisfied with a general acquiescence in his will, without rigidly exacting from us the whole of what he has commanded. We therefore cast away some vices and follies—and they are such vices and follies, it will be found, as cost us the least sacrifice—but we retain others—which our habits have endeared to us, and the expulsion of which would tear us as it were from ourselves. These cherished relics of our corruption we carefully screen from the searching eye of our own consciences, and the observation of the world, whilst we triumphantly point to the few less deeply rooted weeds which we have succeeded in eradicating.


If our consciences cannot acquit us on this head, they must also assure us,—if there be any truth in the passage of Scripture now before us,—that we are not fit for the kingdom of God. God has not left us to choose *how* we shall serve him. The

only thing left open to us to choose, is, whether we will be the servants,—the friends<sup>b</sup>, let me rather say—of Christ, or the bond-slaves of Satan. When once we have chosen Christ as our patron, the way by which his friendship is to be cultivated, is fully laid down for us in the Scriptures; and we cannot alter the prescribed mode without the greatest presumption and sin. “We cannot go beyond the word of the Lord our God, to do less or more<sup>i</sup>.” One sin willingly retained and indulged, defaces and mars all the qualities of the Christian character. It may seem the least of seeds; but it soon grows up to an obnoxious size, and casting a baneful shade around it, withers every neighbouring plant of holiness. Our hearts must be the Lord’s without any exception or reservation whatever<sup>k</sup>. To be religiously disposed to a certain extent or degree, and to suffer the remainder of our hearts to be occupied by the world;—is a disposition utterly unknown to the Gospel.

<sup>b</sup> See John xv. 15.

<sup>i</sup> Numbers xxii. 18.

<sup>k</sup> See Luke xiv. 33.

Let us, then, my Christian brethren, turn our thoughts inward into our own bosoms, and examine, whether we are of the number of those, who have put their hand to the plough, and are looking back in any of those several ways, which I have here pointed out to you. If we find, that, having well begun, (and all of us have well begun, who have received the grace of baptism,) we have subsequently fallen back, and slackened our exertions—or that we are preferring any other claims to the more pressing one of our Religion—or that we are only purposing to be religious and delaying our purpose—or that we are endeavouring to compromise between our allegiance to Christ and our love to the world;—let these remarkable words of our Lord speak an admonition to us before it be too late :—“ no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” Think while you have time, how awful a thing it is, to be unfit for the kingdom of God :—awful indeed, when you look to the brief, uncer-  

space, in which your preparation must

at any rate be completed : for very soon—even if your life be protracted to the longest span;—your fitness, or unfitness, must be *unalterable* by any endeavours on your part ; and will be inevitably followed by your happiness, or your unhappiness, *for ever*. Trust not to any imaginary, delusive expectations of God's mercy, *beyond* the express sanction of his word. What he has said in the Scriptures, that he will surely perform : and there he has clearly set forth, *on what terms* he will be merciful. Such as are looking for his mercy, on *any* other terms than those written in the Gospel, do but tempt God and risk their eternal welfare. God is gracious indeed, and will abundantly pardon, through the mediation and intercession of his blessed Son our Lord : but pardon is only for the faithful and penitent,—for those who, out of an honest and good heart, and with meekness, receiving the engrafted word, adopt it in all its parts, without exception—without addition or diminution—without any alteration whatever,—as the rule of their lives.

## SERMON IX.

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### THE WORLD RESIGNED FOR CHRIST.

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LUKE II. 29—32.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,  
according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen  
thy salvation; which thou hast prepared before  
the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gen-  
tiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.

It was an ordinance of the Law of Moses,  
that every first-born male child should be  
regarded as holy to the Lord, and re-  
deemed from the service of the sanctuary  
by an offering made in his stead. By this  
ordinance it was intended, to commemorate  
the signal deliverance of the children of the  
Israelites, on that awful night, when the  
first-born of the Egyptians were smitten,

and "there was a great cry in Egypt; for there was not a house where there was not one dead <sup>a</sup>:"—thus to mark by a religious solemnity, an act of reservation on the part of God; by whom the first-born of Israel, whom he then spared, were in a manner set apart or hallowed to himself. When he, who was "the first-born of every creature <sup>b</sup>," condescended to be born of a

<sup>a</sup> Exod. xii. 30.

<sup>b</sup> Col. i. 15. The cavil which has been raised on this expression appears entirely groundless, when we consider that it is an idiom of the Greek language, to speak of any thing, which it is intended to except as preeminent above a class of objects, as if it were included among them; as, for instance, the Greek historian speaks of a particular war, as the most memorable (in literal translation) *of those that had preceded*: (Thucyd. i. 1.) an idiom which, indeed, Milton has imitated, where he says,

"Adam, the goodliest man of men since born  
His sons, the fairest of her daughters Eve."

*Parad. Lost, B. iv. 323.*

Why might not the Son of God then be spoken of, as "the first-born of every creature," without its being inferred that he is, *therefore*, one of the creatures?—Besides, the expression may have a reference to this ordinance of the Mosaic Law:—Jesus being

woman, and of a woman of that people on whom this special injunction was laid; his parents brought him, as their first-born, to the Temple, "to do for him after the custom of the law." Here, however, was no ordinary presentation. Never had the first Temple, whilst it stood in all its beauty of holiness, been the scene of so holy an offering, as that which the latter Temple then exhibited. And the circumstances attending the rite were, accordingly, of a peculiar character of solemnity. Two venerable Israelites,—holy monuments of that pure and sublime piety, which the discipline of the Law was designed by its nature to produce,—were convened to attest and celebrate the event;—Simeon, "a just and devout man, waiting for the consolation of Israel;" and the aged Prophetess Anna, one who "served God with fastings and prayers night and day." Of the latter

the great First-born, of whom all the others were types. See Psalm lxxxix. 27. Rom. viii. 29. Heb. i. 6.—If, indeed, we had at first misconceived the expression, the verses immediately following it are sufficient to set us right. See Col. i. 16—19.



we have no express words given; only it is said, that "she gave thanks unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem." But the former, who came into the Temple at the instant of the Presentation, by the special direction of the Spirit, who had "revealed unto him, that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ,"—poured forth his pious gratitude in a hymn, which the same Spirit by whom it was dictated, has recorded for the instruction of the faithful in after-times. He took up the child Jesus in his arms; and "blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation; which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

The words indeed are sufficiently familiar to us all, from their recurrence in our public service. But perhaps that very familiarity has caused us to pass over them

without due consideration, and not fully to perceive the Christian lesson involved in them. Let us then, on the present occasion, sustain them for a while in our attention, and endeavour to render them henceforth a better understood and more heartfelt expression of our own thanksgiving to God. For our Church, it must be supposed, has put this song into our mouths when we come into the Temple of the Lord, intending that we should utter it with similar feelings to those with which its first utterance in a House of God was accompanied.

The joyousness of this eucharistic hymn is that circumstance in it which first demands our notice. It sounds to the ear as the Christian's national song of liberty. It expresses a complete abandonment of the feelings to the one object of universal thanksgiving, in which the tongue is employed. Salvation is the burden of it. To have *seen the salvation* of God, was the accomplishment of the heart's desire to the devout Simeon. He rejoices that life has

been spared to him, to behold that salvation. All other considerations are overwhelmed and sunk in this one transcendent theme of joy. And we shall not wonder that the words should express such exultation. For to behold that, to which, through a long tract of time, we have looked forward, with anxious, fervent hope—is in itself a source of the greatest pleasure. But when, moreover, not only has our expectation been raised to the highest pitch, but we further know that our dearest interests are concerned in the object, which we have had in view and have at length attained;—then, must the inmost chord of the heart be struck; and hope fulfilled becomes indeed the transport of the soul. The occasion on which this hymn of joy was poured forth, was one of this kind; or rather, it was of a nature surpassing every possible circumstance of human calculation. You will readily allow this, if you consider,

I. Who that sacred Person was, whose presentation in the Temple was thus greet-

ed by these favoured saints of God. My Brethren!—if you have listened to the voice of Scripture with that docility—with that humble resignation of the thoughts of your heart—which the authority of a Divine message exacts from those to whom it is sent—you will not require to be told by me now—or be startled at the declaration, as if it were a setting forth of new and unheard-of things,—that the precious burden which Simeon held in his arms, as he thus poured forth the devotion of his heart, was no other than the incarnate God—the Word made flesh—the Lord of Hosts, appearing in fashion as a man. You will be pleased to recognize in the most exalted description, that I may give you, of this holiest first-born, that conception of him, which has ever been the animating principle of your religious sentiments. You will remember, that Saint John has introduced him to our devout contemplation at the very opening of his gospel, (as if designedly pre-occupying the mind of his readers with that notion of Jesus Christ, which should

accompany their reading of him throughout the book,) as the Word that "was in the beginning with God and was God;"—adding, that "by him all things were made and without him was not any thing made, that was made:"—that he is described as "the only-begotten Son of God,"—that is, the Son of God, not born in the manner, in which all other sons of God, whether angels or men, are born, but in an eminently peculiar manner of derivation, constituting him *the only Son*, and rendering it no presumption in him "to be equal with God\*." With these pointed expressions, declaring the supreme dignity of Jesus Christ, you will have combined many other intimations of his Divine nature; found, not only in the writings of the inspired preachers of the Gospel, but in those sublime anticipations of him, which glow in the pages of the Jewish prophets. From a great number of passages of Scripture, accordingly, you will have been already convinced, that the wonderful Person,

\* See Phil. ii. 6.

then hailed by Simeon and Anna at his appearance in the Temple, and by whose name we are called—was neither an angelic spirit ;—nor man alone :—that, whilst in all things he was made like unto us, sin only excepted, he was also no less, perfect God ;—that in him were united two distinct natures—the divine and the human—through which mysterious union, he became the Christ—“ Christ the Lord ”—“ the Lord’s Christ.” The influx of the God-head into the holy humanity of Jesus, was that anointing which constituted his Messiahship ;—which consecrated him to be the visible salvation of God. “ For mine eyes have *seen thy salvation*,” exclaimed this venerable confessor of Gospel truth—the patient and faithful Simeon. He saw by the eye of faith, God saving the world in the infant whom he beheld with his bodily eyes. Well, therefore, did he preface this confession with the rapturous ejaculation ;—“ Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace.” The person, whose presence then hallowed the latter house of the Lord,—rendering its glory

greater than that of the former, according to the prophecy of Haggai<sup>d</sup>,—was one, whose coming was indeed a meet subject of gratulation to the devout Israelite; and well might “fill the mouth with laughter, and the tongue with singing,” of those that were “waiting for him.”

III. But, in the next place consider,—for what object this Divine person had descended from the right hand of the Majesty on high, to visit us as a brother; and you will then see more clearly the ground of the exultation manifested by these worthies of the Jewish Faith. The object indeed is implied in Simeon’s confession, that his “eyes had seen the *salvation*” of the Lord; as well as in that account of Anna; that “she spake of him to all them that looked for *redemption* in Jerusalem.” These were true disciples of Judaism; for they were not bigotted in their attachment to it, as a system complete in itself, and jealous of all improvement; but they

<sup>d</sup> Haggai ii. 7—9.

<sup>e</sup> Psalm cxxvi. 2.

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accepted and obeyed the old religion, as containing in it the germ of a new, and more comprehensive, and more spiritual, and more vital one;—as giving the promise of redemption, and leading them to look forward to a better condition of light and knowledge.—Christianity was, indeed, to the faithful Jew, in some measure, what the promise of everlasting life is to the disciple of the Gospel. In neither system of faith does the true disciple acquiesce in the *present* enjoyment of his religion, as satisfactory, and final in its nature. Each demands to be regarded as a “kingdom of God,” having reference to another more spiritual kingdom of God subsequent to it.—Simeon and Anna accordingly,—these “Israelites indeed”—beheld with joy in Jesus, one prepared to be “a light to lighten the Gentiles,” as well as “the glory of God’s people Israel.” They devoutly received him, as one pointed out by their religion—as the salvation of the Lord—the looked-for redemption—the object of holy thanksgiving to God. And here again, I trust, I may confidently appeal



to your own convictions, to justify this their devout resignation of themselves to Jesus, as their Saviour. With the history spread before you of the wonderful life of Jesus, you have heard the message of the angel to Joseph, expressly naming the child of Mary, the Saviour:—"thou shalt call his name *Jesus*, (or Saviour,) for he shall *save his people from their sins*."—You have heard also those declarations from his own lips;—"I came not to judge the world but *to save the world*;"—"the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to *save them*;"—"I must preach the kingdom of God . . . for *therefore* am I sent";—"the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to *give his life a ransom for many*;"—"and *if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me*."—These and many other like passages of Scripture, interpreted by reference to the predictions of the Old Testament, and the events of

Matt. i. 21.      <sup>s</sup> John xii. 47.      <sup>h</sup> Luke ix. 56.

Luke iv. 43.      <sup>k</sup> Matt. xx. 28. Mark x. 45.

<sup>l</sup> John xii. 32.

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the life of Jesus related in the Gospels;—events, exhibiting throughout, a character of *devotedness* to the salvation of man—have clearly, I trust, defined to you, the office of that holiest first-born, then presented in the Temple, as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world.”

Such was that holy person both as to his nature, and as to his office, over whom the hymn of the text was uttered. He was the “first-born of all creatures”—the only-begotten of the Father, by an eternal generation—“before ever the earth and the world were made; God from everlasting to everlasting;” appearing in the flesh, as the first-born of an earthly parent. He was the Redeemer of mankind, himself redeemed by an humble offering from the service of that sanctuary of God on earth; which was soon to be abolished by an immense and all-sufficient redemption,—wrought in his own person,—with his own blood.

That these two devout individuals, who

<sup>m</sup> John i. 29.

thus proclaimed the tidings of the Gospel in accents of prophetic thanksgiving, were illumined to behold in the lowly child Jesus, the whole glory of his nature and office, we are not perhaps authorized to assert. They were endued indeed with a spirit of prophecy; for by that, they were enabled to see through the clouds which hung over his birth, and to discover the real glory which those clouds of thick darkness embosomed within them. But we must recollect that they were still disciples of Judaism:—they were only among the *preparatory* messengers of the Gospel. The future Redeemer had not been born many days, at the time when they gave their testimony to him. They had not the benefit of the instruction conveyed—by the actual events of his life—by his personal preaching—by his exertions in going “about his Father’s business.”

They had indeed, (and probably enjoyed with a more spiritual perception,) those prophecies of the Old Testament, which shed so luminous an evidence on the doctrine of Redemption to the Christian

world at this day,—to guide them to an understanding of the nature and office of Jesus. They had the evangelical Isaiah, realizing almost to their view the destined Redeemer, at once, in the height of his glory, and the depth of his humiliation. They had the oracular Daniel, declaring the period, at which “Messiah the Prince” should appear, and telling of him, as one that should “be cut off, but not for himself.” They had the gifted Psalmist of Israel, describing with vivid touches several characteristic features of the life of the promised Heir of his throne, at once, his Son, and his Lord. These mirrors of Gospel-truth certainly served greatly to direct the expectant eye of the devout and faithful Jew. Still, we cannot place these earliest converts on a level, in their understanding of the great mystery of Atonement, with those, who have surveyed the course of the ministry of Jesus—who have contemplated the whole manner of his appearing—who have marked him going on his walk of death, and tending by painful steps towards

▪ Daniel ix. 25, 26.

that consummation of suffering, when he "gave up the ghost" on the Cross? They were, however, Christians in spirit, though not in fact. The Gospel was in their hearts, if it was not fully declared by their tongues. They gave thanks for Christ, to the extent of that revelation of him with which they were favoured, whatever it was. They cordially accepted Jesus as their God and their Redeemer, so far as their situation at that period of the Gospel, enabled them to do so. And here it is, that their conduct at the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, is an example to us. The spirit, which they evinced in their confession of Jesus, when adopted by the Christian, will become in him, a spirit of thanksgiving for the redemption vouchsafed to him through "God manifest in the flesh." The song of Simeon, when echoed by the Christian in the spirit of Simeon, will express the resignation of the heart to a Divine Redeemer; on whose perfect satisfaction, made on the Cross for

° See Matt. xi. 11. Luke vii. 28.

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the sins of the whole world, it implicitly reposes,

Let us then, contemplate the spirit of resignation to Christ, as the Redeemer of the world, exhibited by these two holy Israelites;—and try ourselves, whether, in repeating the song of Simeon, as our own thanksgiving to God, we make that heartfelt confession, which it imports, of the faith of the Gospel.

That we may sincerely take up the words of this song, we must, like these holy Israelites, place our hope and trust in the salvation of the Gospel. We must be among them that look for Redemption. That must be “the thing that we long for.” In that we must place the grand interest of our life—the consummation of our death. “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s<sup>P</sup>.” Our hearts must no longer be absorbed in worldly

<sup>P</sup> Rom. xiv. 8.

wares,—in merely taking thought for the things of the morrow. The salvation through Christ, we must esteem, as “the pearl of great price,”—as the treasure for which all that we have must be sold.

But is this the case, my Christian Brethren, with you? Do you so appreciate that holy faith, in which it has been your privilege to have been baptized and nurtured, as really to behold in it, your only sure title to the favour of God, and to happiness both temporal and eternal, as well as your compensation for the insufficiencies and disappointments of this present life? Let each person put the question to his own conscience. If you have the answer of a good conscience, that you have cordially received the doctrine of Redemption through the blood of Christ—that you really “count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, your Lord”<sup>a</sup>—happy indeed are you. Let me exhort you to go on from strength to strength;—stedfast in the faith;—bearing up against

<sup>a</sup> Phil. iii. 8.

afflictions, or temptations in any other form; with tranquil and patient spirit, as sufferers under the hand of the Lord; with animated and firm resistance to evil, as *working out* your salvation. Since, by waiting patiently for the consolation of Israel, at length obtained a sight of his expected joy, and felt that he had ~~that~~ in comparison with which the world had no charms for him. So do you endure to the ~~end~~—and hereafter you will experience the joy of a trust in your Redeemer; when, awaking up after his likeness, you will behold him “face to face.”

But if, on the contrary, the conscience of any, when closely examined, confesses the unhappy secret, that as yet they have thought but little, if at all, after a Christian manner, of Christ their Saviour, that they have been accustomed to look for happiness every where else, rather than in the simple devotion of themselves to the Lord Jesus Christ—that, most unlike these holy Israelites, they have resigned the Gospel for the world, and not the world for the Gospel:—of such no faithful minister can



"prophecy smooth things!"—Christ has "died in vain" for them;—they are "yet in their sins!" For such, Jesus is "set for a fall," and "for a sign that shall be spoken against." They cannot be of his sheep: for they hear not the voice of their shepherd.

Whilst, however, the danger of such a state cannot be too broadly stated, let not the statement be so understood, as to carry despondency to the heart of any. The Gospel indeed cannot be rejected with impunity; but it rejects none, who take sanctuary within it,—though late,—yet with deep repentance for the past. Let them only be awakened to see that the idols of happiness which they venerate, are but "lies in their hands." Let them turn from such vanities and seek after God. Let them remember, that, by virtue of their Christian calling, they are required to be holy, "separate from sinners," pledged to renounce the world, dedicated to God:—and let them instantly go back to *their*

\* See Isaiah xliv. 20.

*own*, whom they have forsaken, and their souls shall live.

By some, perhaps, it will be objected, that these instances of resignation to Christ, which I would propose as examples to the general believer—are not strictly imitable by the Christian of the present day: and the words of Simeon, it may be thought, may be conscientiously repeated by others, without the like *entire surrender of the heart* to the salvation which they proclaim. But such an objection, my Brethren, is only an artifice of the world to keep us to itself. The world is not disinclined to suggest to us the propriety of treating the Gospel with respect—of acknowledging ourselves its disciples—of complying with its ordinances—and even giving some of our thoughts to its serious consideration. But when we would enter into the sanctuary, and fall down on our knees, and prostrate our hearts before God, it draws us back again to itself:—checking our zeal with imputations of enthusiasm, or cold distinctions, or some plausible exceptions

to such strictness of devotion. And thus it would induce us to think the examples of primitive piety, as antiquated, and unadapted to general imitation.

If, however, we are to believe the Scriptures,—if we venerate, as we ought, their authority as the rule of our life,—let us not pare down our religion to the standard of the world. Let us not go on lepping off branch after branch from our faith, to satisfy the vulgar taste of the multitude, until we have reduced it to a leafless, unsightly trunk, and destroyed every characteristic of its species. Let us hold nothing obsolete; on which is the evident stamp of Scripture. Let us not dread so much the danger, of going beyond, as of not coming up to, the requirements of the Gospel. The lines of duty traced by the world, when held up to this mirror, become legible in their proper form, and according to their true meaning. If, for instance, it is written in the world,—“Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of

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thine eyes;"—read this fallacious instruction as it runs in Scripture, and it becomes the solemn warning,—“know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment <sup>1</sup>.” If in the world you read,—“Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die”—read its scriptural version in the page of the Apostle—“Awake to righteousness and sin not <sup>2</sup>.” If the world invites us to itself, and promises that with it we shall find rest unto our souls, hear its invitation rendered by Saint John in its proper meaning,—“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him <sup>3</sup>.” and by Saint James,—“Know ye not, the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God <sup>4</sup>.” Is it the self-confident boast of the world,—“To-day or to-morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell and

<sup>1</sup> Ecclesiastes xi. 9.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 32.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John ii. 15.

<sup>4</sup> James iv. 4.

get gain :”—hear it corrected in the Scripture—“Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow : for what is your life ? it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.”

So opposite are the instructions of Scripture and the world ; and as on no subordinate point can the true disciple of Christ obey the world rather than the Scripture, so neither can he take the tone of his religion from the world. The fashion of that which is to endure, cannot be moulded from that whose “fashion passeth away.” The concerns of eternity cannot be contracted to the dimensions of the things of a day. But the Scripture knows no religion but such as glows with the love of God<sup>2</sup>. It is not *respect* to the divine ordinances, which satisfies its demand. It is our *devotion* which it exacts. “If any man *love* not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema, maranatha<sup>3</sup>.” Here, then, is the Christian’s plain direction. It signifies not to

<sup>2</sup> James iv. 13, 14.

<sup>2</sup> See Sermon VI. p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 22.

him, what degree of religion the world may prescribe and tolerate. He knows that he must "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." To no other religion is the promise attached of victory over the world. No other is strong enough to bear us up above the deep waters of ungodliness, on which our voyage is cast. No other has wings to raise us from earth to heaven. No other will enable us to "depart in peace."

## SERMON X.

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### EFFICACY OF REPENTANCE REVEALED BY THE GOSPEL.

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LUKE xv. 3—7.

He spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

THE doctrine of the efficacy of repentance is an essential article of the glad tidings revealed to mankind in Christ. We are apt to think, that sincere repentance for an offence that we have committed, must have

some influence in removing, or at least mitigating, the punishment due to it. Whilst, under a deep sense of contrition, we feel that we are altered characters, that we are, as it were, no longer the *guilty* individuals by whom the offence was committed. And thus, reasoning from what we are in the moment of repentance, we conclude, that punishment will not be our portion. But how fallacious is this reasoning! God sees both what we *were*, and what we *are*, at one view, and with equal distinctness; and judges impartially of us, from a survey of our *whole* conduct, not as man judges, from the impression of *the* last moment. Before him, therefore, we still stand as guilty, even while we come to him as penitents, and must expect to be treated by him accordingly, with reference to our guilt, as well as to our repentance. Looking, indeed, on the course of divine providence, we are led to hope, from those evident signs of God's compassion and willingness to succour, which that course presents,—that we may “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”



But the same course of providence also shews us, that sin and misery are closely joined together; and that God will by no means "*clear* the guilty." The punishment of sin may not be always visible to the eye of the world; but let the most secret sinner ask his own conscience, and he must confess, in the compunctious visitings of this witness of God within him, that he has experienced retribution. The punishment also may not immediately follow; and sometimes may seem to be put away altogether; but at length the "*sin finds out*" the guilty man, and lays its vindictive hand on him in some form of suffering. So that, though nature suggests consolation in the hope of Divine mercy; nature, at the same time, forbids any presumption of the *entire* efficacy of repentance to do away sin. The necessary efficacy of repentance is only the treasure of human speculation; unwarranted by those instructions concerning the dealings of God, which are given to us in the course and constitution of the natural world.

On this darkness of our natural state,

the Gospel has cast a cheering ray. It has imparted to us the secret, wherein the efficacy of Repentance lies. By revealing to us the Atonement of the Cross, it has declared to us the manner, in which God "might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus". The very purport of that Atonement being, to save us from our sins, it brought with it the power of rendering our conversion from sin acceptable to God. Thus Saint Paul unites in one form of expression, "Repentance toward God and Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ<sup>b</sup>," as coherent parts of the covenant of grace. It is the repentance that is of faith, which averts the Divine punishment. Under the Jewish Law, indeed, we find repeated promises of pardon to the penitent Israelite; but under that law there was no effectual security against the evil consequences of sin. The repentance which it inculcated, and to which it promised pardon, was a conversion to the whole law;—a return to obedience to the Divine com-

<sup>a</sup> Rom. iii. 26,

<sup>b</sup> Acts xx. 21.

mandments in their integrity;—to which entire obedience on the part of the penitent it graciously held out its recompense, whilst it proclaimed that his past iniquity should be remembered no more. It was a repentance which savoured of the spirit of Christianity, but it was not a repentance accompanied with the grace of Christianity. The repentance arising from a faith in Christ, is alone effectual to the divine forgiveness *in the act itself*; because it is grounded on a reliance on that Righteousness which God has accepted as a satisfaction for sins. I say not, that the repentance of the Christian will in itself ensure his salvation; but that, through the Atonement of Christ, it has an efficacy to remove the Divine displeasure, and in itself to place the sinner on the vantage-ground of the Divine mercy.

This characteristic consolation of the Gospel is engagingly brought before us in that passage of it which we now consider. The favour of God as displayed towards the penitent in the mission of Jesus Christ,

own, whom they have forsaken, and their souls shall live.

By some, perhaps, it will be objected, that these instances of resignation to Christ, which I would propose as examples to the general believer—are not strictly imitable by the Christian of the present day: and the words of Simeon, it may be thought, may be conscientiously repeated by others, without the like *entire surrender of the heart* to the salvation which they proclaim. But such an objection, my Brethren, is only an artifice of the world to keep us to itself. The world is not disinclined to suggest to us the propriety of treating the Gospel with respect—of acknowledging ourselves its disciples—of complying with its ordinances—and even giving some of our thoughts to its serious consideration. But when we would enter into the sanctuary, and fall down on our knees, and prostrate our hearts before God, it draws us back again to itself:—checking our zeal with imputations of enthusiasm, or cold distinctions, or some plausible exceptions

returning prodigal welcomed to the home of his father.

Rightly to understand the description here given of the efficacy of an evangelical repentance, we must advert to the circumstances, in reference to which the declaration of the text was primarily made. The persons to whom it was addressed were men who had been trained in the Law of Moses; an exact obedience to which constituted a personal righteousness in the obedient individual. "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments," says the Lord by Moses, "which if a man do, he shall *live* in them." The Mosaic Law was accordingly, as to its nature, *a law of life*. The faithful disciple of it, if such were to be found, stood "just" in the sight of God. Hence we may account for those descriptions, which occur in Scripture, of "just persons," when, according to the tenour of the Gospel, "all are con-

Levit. xviii. 5.; also Ezek. xx. 11.

"Joseph, the husband of Mary, is so termed—

cluded under sin<sup>6</sup>," "for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God<sup>7</sup>;" and we are taught to look up to one alone among those born of women, as "the Just One<sup>8</sup>." What constituted the true righteousness of the Law of Moses, was indeed sadly perverted in our Saviour's time. The weightier duties of the Law had been abandoned in pursuit of its ceremonial injunctions; so that our Saviour, in speaking of "the righteous," or "the just," spoke partly with reference to such as presumed on their *legal* righteousness, without really possessing it. Still the expression derived its force from its understood relation to the Law of Moses. On the other hand, those who were not within the pale of the Law of Moses, were regarded as "sinners," and as excluded from the favour of God. This is sufficiently evident in that inquiry; "have any of the rulers or of the Phari-

also John the Baptist—Simeon—Joseph of Arimathea—the Gentile, Cornelius, as a Jewish Proselyte. St. Paul calls Ananias "a devout man according to the law," Acts xxii. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Gal. iii. 22.

<sup>7</sup> Rom. iii. 23.

<sup>8</sup> Zech. ix. 9. Acts xxi. 14, &c.



sees believed on him? but this people who *knoweth not* the Law, are cursed <sup>b</sup>." Accordingly the Jews were scandalized at our Saviour's associating with such persons as were sinners in their estimation. They taunted him as the "friend of publicans and sinners <sup>c</sup>." They were ignorant of the spirit of the Gospel. They knew not that it was essentially a doctrine of "repentance and remission of sins <sup>d</sup>." This gave occasion to our Saviour, at once, to point out the true character of his religion, and to reprove them for their mistaken self-righteousness, by using those strong contrasts of expression; "I am not come to call the *righteous*, but *sinners* to *repentance* <sup>e</sup>;" "I am not sent but unto the *lost sheep* of the house of Israel <sup>f</sup>;" "there is joy in heaven over one *sinner* that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine *just* persons which need no repentance."

<sup>b</sup> John vii. 48, 49.

<sup>c</sup> Matt. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34. In further illustration of their opinion concerning "sinners;" see Luke xiii. 1—5. John ix. 13—34. Gal. ii. 15.

<sup>d</sup> Luke xxiv. 47. <sup>e</sup> Matt. ix. 13. <sup>f</sup> Ibid. xv. 24.

From this view of the form of our Saviour's declaration here given, I go on to consider its substance—the cordial reception of the penitent under the law of grace published to the world in Christ.

As Faith is sometimes used to express the simple notion of believing in Christ, viewed separately from those other graces which must *in fact* always accompany a real belief in him; and sometimes (in its more proper sense) is a comprehensive designation of the whole of Christianity: so Repentance sometimes stands for a particular act—that of forsaking our sins, separated in thought from our belief in the Atonement of the Cross, and from holiness of conduct;—or, in its more proper sense, represents an effectual conversion to the Gospel—an entire adoption of it in all its parts as the rule of our lives. Faith and Repentance, in their enlarged sense, imply in truth the same thing, and differ only in the view which they take of the Gospel redemption. By Faith, the sinner accepts the Atonement, as it refers to God who



pardons by that way,—by Repentance, the sinner accepts the Atonement, as it refers to himself who needs it".

POINTS TO GOD.

It is to repentance in this comprehensive sense that the declaration of the text applies. All men are called upon by the Gospel to confess themselves to be *sinners*, and as *such* to feel the indispensable necessity of repentance. All men not only need repentance, or a change of mind—a renunciation of the vanities of the world, the flesh, and the devil, for the spirituality of the religion of Christ;—but also, after having acknowledged and embraced that religion in its proper nature, need the continual renewing of repentance—a continual turning back to that profession on which they have entered. The same principle by which a Christian has been brought to feel his need of a Redeemer, and to confess his sins, and become a Christian indeed, must operate throughout his whole life. His life must be one continued

\* See Bishop Taylor's *Doctrine and Practice of Repentance*, ch. ii. sec. ii. Works, vol. vii. p. 315.

repenting, or turning towards God. The principle, indeed, will exhibit different modifications in his subsequent course, according to the strength which, through divine grace, he has acquired, in resisting the temptations of the world. Some, adhering more closely to their holy calling than others, who are not equally assiduous workers with the Holy Spirit, will not evidence that thorough change of life which is strictly implied by Repentance. But still the principle will be equally vigorous in them. The renewing of the heart will be going on in them, though its outward effects are not so great nor so visible to the eye of man, as in the same persons, perhaps, at an earlier period of their Christian progress, or as in those, in whom it causes a transition from the gross darkness of sin to the light of holiness. For the moment that a man ceases to repent, he forgets that he is a *sinner*, and loses sight, consequently, of that reliance on the blood of the Redeemer, on which his salvation depends. That he may maintain the faith, therefore, the Christian,

however advanced in his course of improvement, can never stay from repenting.

All men are therefore appropriately taught by our Saviour himself, amidst his revelation of the grace vouchsafed by his atoning sacrifice, the great importance of repentance. And what more forcible method of demonstrating its importance could he have adopted, than that exhibited in the passage of the text? It is not by any common standard that its value is measured, but by the estimation in which it is held "*in heaven*." He indicates its preciousness "*in the presence of the angels of God*." The recovery of the sinner, we are told, is a subject of intense interest, even in the regions where is "*fulness of joy*," and where are "*pleasures for evermore*." The grace of Christianity begins to diffuse its influence at the source from which it emanates, by enabling the blessed to sympathize in the fortunes of sinful man.

We all know from experience the increased value which an object that once we have cherished with care, acquires in our estimation when we are deprived of it.

We all know, again, the delight of recovering what we had almost given up in despair as lost for ever. We all know, further, the preciousness of that, to which the circumstance belongs of being our *only* possession of its kind °; or of that, which is the only thing wanting to complete some desired object; or of that on which we have expended much care and labour. All these estimates of value are brought to bear, by this declaration of our Saviour, on the case of the penitent. He transfers them, by way of illustration, to the bosom of the saints of heaven; leading us thereby to perceive the unspeakable importance of repentance to mankind at large. Every individual of his fold on earth is taught to consider himself, as the one individual, on whom the interest of heaven is concentrated, in anxious expectation of his return to holiness and salvation. Such is the view

° See this in the parable of Nathan: "the poor man had nothing save one little ewe lamb," &c. 2 Samuel xii. and in Gen. xxii. 12, "Now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

which every humble Christian may take of his own condition. By such endearments is he invited, to arise, and go to his Father, day by day, and say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee; and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

My Christian brethren! this message of the Gospel has been intended, to quicken us in the pursuit of the life everlasting, purchased for us by our Redeemer; and let us endeavour so to apply it. If we would imbibe the spirit of the Gospel, we must be sensible—deeply sensible—that we are sinners in the sight of God. As we regard the divine interest in our behalf—as we value the joyful sympathy of the heavenly host,—let us not scruple to confess,—what every human heart must confess, if the truth be extorted from it,—that *we are not* among those imaginary "just persons who need no repentance." Animated by this assurance of Christ in the passage before us, let us cast away all vain hope in our own righteousness, and unreservedly throw ourselves on the divine

mercy. We cannot love God sincerely and ardently,—we cannot love him with the love of Christians,—whilst we contentedly repose in our present attainments of righteousness, or presume that we have but *little* to be forgiven us at his hands. We may not be among the number of those who refuse to be converted to the Gospel;—we may be, happily, (and O that we all were so!) of those who account it their wisdom, to be taught of God, and the perfection of their nature, to be like Christ, and who are labouring to attain that perfection. Still, I should no less feel it bound upon me, to preach to you, to repent,—deeply and constantly to repent. For the Gospel is no longer the Gospel, if it be so preached, that remission of sins is separated from repentance. It is a stranger to a religion without repentance. Though we may belong to the flock of Christ, we act inconsistently with our profession, unless we are also really persuaded, that we have *much* to be forgiven us. A man may have “loved God in his youth and feared him in his age,” but he

must still feel (in order to rank as a saint of the Gospel,) that if God should be "extreme to mark *what he has done unto*," he cannot "abide it." For, read that passage of Scripture, in which our Saviour points out to Simon the Pharisee, the connexion of a heart-felt love of God with a conviction of our great need of forgiveness. "Wherefore I say unto thee," he observes, "her sins which are many are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." The Christian, who consoles himself with the thought, that he has done his utmost in the service of God, and that he only needs a *little* forgiveness, is not as far removed, as he seems, from one who imagines that he has no need of repentance. He is not truly sensible of that relation in which he stands towards God, as a *new creature* through the Gospel—as a disciple of a Saviour, who came "to seek and to save that which was lost."—"not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." *Luke* 45. 47. *Luke* 14. 16.



Let it not, however, be supposed, that we must endeavour to convince ourselves of a sinfulness, from which, by the grace of God, we have escaped, in order to repent truly. There cannot be any absolute, uniform, standard of guilt applicable to every heart. To feel the necessity of great forgiveness from God, and consequently of deep humiliation before him, there is no occasion to go into the abyss of despair. Look only to the means of grace that you have enjoyed—to the opportunities of working out your salvation which have been permitted to you—and there, doubtless, you will find ample materials, for confessing your unworthiness, and imploring the grace of a true repentance from the very bottom of your hearts; without putting your conscience to unnecessary torture, to obtain from it avowals which it knows not in truth. Look moreover to the daily inconsistencies which your conduct exhibits with the rule by which it professes to be directed; and then judge, whether you do not need to be continually “transformed by the renewing of your mind.” For is not every positive sin



which you commit—every omission of a duty enjoined by the Gospel—so far as it goes, an infidelity in act—a forsaking of God—~~the~~ denial of divine grace? If true Christianity be a divine life, as I trust we are fully persuaded it is, and not a divine science:—surely, every act in which is not some principle of the Gospel, is, in its degree, a turning from God; and needs, therefore, a repentance,—or turning back to the profession which we have deserted in it.

Further; it is not necessary that we should appeal to the conduct of profligate sinners, in examining into our own need of repentance. We must look to ourselves alone; leaving others to the judgment of their Lord. So that we can have no ground for supposing ourselves “just persons who need no repentance.” “God! I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,”—is no part of the Christian’s confession. He takes rather the opposite view of his case. He looks upon others in charity,—on himself with severity. The Gospel is throughout a personal concern

of the individual. Each must receive it, as if he were the one person to whom its call is addressed. Is the lost sheep spoken of? he is that lost sheep:—is the one sinner that repenteth recommended to his notice? he is that one sinner called to repentance.

Receive then, my Brethren, this passage of the Gospel, at once, as your instruction in the spirit of your religion, and your incentive towards that holiness whose end is life everlasting. Let none understand it in such a way, as to exempt himself from its admonition and comfort.—You that are living in unbelief, “denying the Lord that bought” you, bring down the proud thoughts of your hearts, and be converted to belief:—for the joy of heaven carries your conversion.—You who, having believed, have fallen from grace, “crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting him to an open shame;”—consider your ways, and turn from your transgressions:—for, the eyes of the blessed are waiting for your return.—You, who are endeavouring

to walk in the faith, but are shewing forth only a very imperfect obedience—looking to the world as well as to the faith—not doing all things, whatsoever you do, to the glory of God :—henceforth submit yourselves entirely to the yoke of Christ—“let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus :”—for, there are those in heaven, who long that their joy in you may be full. —You, who are taking up your cross, and following your Lord with your heart and soul; and who yet feel the perishable body weighing down the soul—finding, that the good that you would you do not, but the evil which you would not that you do; and that you are, after all, unprofitable servants :—be encouraged to lean more and more devotedly on the Divine mercy; and water all your paths with the tears of repentance : for your heaviness attracts the sympathy of the Lord and his holy Angels; —your “godly sorrow” must endure for the present season; but, be of good cheer; it is hailed with glad halleluiahs in the courts of heaven.

Phil. ii. 5.

## SERMON XI.

### DIFFICULTY OF DELAYED REPENTANCE.

LUKE xiii. 34, 35.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, ye shall not see me, until the time come, when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord\*.

It has been often remarked, that if we should read the accounts of Jesus Christ, which the Evangelists have given us, only as common, uninspired narratives, we could not but feel our hearts forcibly affected by the exquisite amiableness of his character. This particular passage, taken

\* Also Matt. xxiii. 37, 38.

alone, is sufficient to place him before us in a most interesting point of view. Here, indeed, appears one, who, like his predecessor in the work of divine legislation, "was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth<sup>b</sup>;"—one, whom the world may well look up to as their great Example; for he was "meek and lowly in heart." The vexatious disappointment experienced by our Lord in all the labours of love which he had bestowed on his "brethren after the flesh," would have exasperated a temper of ordinary mould, or at least have chilled in most bosoms all interest in their behalf. But in these words of Jesus, there is neither anger, nor alienation of affection. They breathe only the tenderness of compassionate sorrow; a sorrow for the past impenitence of Jerusalem, rendered still more intense, by a prophetic insight into the misery which impended over her. They are the language of a parting friend, affectionately regretting that he is forced to leave the cherished objects of his

<sup>b</sup> Numbers xii. 3.      \* Matt. xi. 29.

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care; and forewarning them, that, little as they now valued his personal presence, the time would come, when they would deeply feel the need of him; when they would earnestly "desire to see one of the days of the Son of man and they should not see it<sup>d</sup>."

The passage before us, being thus regarded as the sorrowful farewell of a rejected Minister of salvation, will afford us the material of instruction, as to the *urgent* necessity of that repentance to which the Christian Revelation invites its hearers.

The words of our Lord at once express a call to repentance, and set forth that call as a final one.

I. They were a call to repentance. Our Saviour, by the certainty of his presence, knew that the miseries, which Jerusalem had brought on herself by her obstinate resistance to him in his character of the Messiah, would surely follow—that her

<sup>d</sup> Luke xvii. 22.

present living form should shortly become "a carcase," where "the eagles should be gathered together;"—when the holy city with its Temple should be "swept with the besom of destruction," so that not one stone should be left upon another. He was fully assured of this. But at the same time he would not lose the opportunity which the prediction of so great a misery afforded him, of appealing once more at least to hearts, that had been obdurate to every milder solicitation. To apprise them, that the day of desolation was determined—that the space for repentance was contracted within certain limits—might be a means of reclaiming those, who, as long as their period of probation seemed indefinite, indulged their indolence and pride, in refusing to be converted to the Gospel. For so it was with Nineveh. When Jonah, by the commission of God, went about her streets, preaching the like awful message to that declared in these words of Jesus;—"yet forty days and Nineveh shall

\* See Matt. xxiv. 28.

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be overthrown ;"—the inhabitants received the warning of the Prophet, and repented in sackcloth and ashes. And they repented effectually. For, the Lord was pleased at their contrition. "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way ; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them ; and he did it not <sup>f</sup>:" at least it occasioned the postponement of that overthrow for many years beyond the period predicted by Jonah <sup>g</sup>. The prediction of the impending woe of Jerusalem was intended, we may conceive, to serve a like purpose. Desolation was announced, not to terrify the hearts of the people ; and still less, merely to give them a foreknowledge of the future destiny of the city ; but to prevent, if it were possible, the very woe itself so announced. The prediction of Jesus was actuated doubtless by the relics of that hope, which had animated all his former exertions, and which yet lingered in his

<sup>f</sup> Jonah iii. 10.

<sup>g</sup> See Nahum throughout, and Zeph ii. 13.



bosom, as if loth to depart ; like a spent flame, quivering between light and darkness—the light of Israel's recovery—the darkness of her utter dissolution.

To some persons, perhaps, the denunciation of woe contained in this passage of Scripture, may appear too explicit to admit of being construed into a warning and call to repentance. The concluding words,—“ Behold your house is left unto you desolate ; and verily I say unto you, ye shall not see me, until the time come, when ye shall say, blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,”—may be thought so decisive of the issue with regard to Jerusalem, as to destroy that hope under which I have asserted them to have been uttered. But the prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh was no less explicit. In this indeed the very time was marked out by the prophet ; and yet that period so expressly foretold was averted by the repentance of Nineveh. So may we justly suppose that the repentance of Jerusalem would have averted her threatened destruction, and consequently that the threat of that destruction was

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designed as a last resource to awaken her repentance.

Such indeed is the view which it behoves us to take of all the divine dispensations. They are all to be judged by us with reference to the principles implanted in human nature. This is the question with regard to them:—in what sense are they applicable as practical principles: for in that they are rightly received. We ought never to lose sight of the important circumstance; that the truths concerning God, are not known to us as matters of discovery, but are *revealed to us by him for our good.* We are not therefore to receive them simply, as truths to be examined in themselves, and so to be reasoned upon as to their necessary consequences. But we are to look at them in the light in which they will affect human life,—in which they will influence the hearts of those who hear them. Thus, whatever may be revealed to us of the foreknowledge of God in the ordination of human events, is only a truth intended for man, so far as it may

be useful to us for the purposes of *our* life. If we knew the truth independently of the *revelation* of God, we might then have some pretence for reasoning from it abstractedly. But as a *revealed* truth, it must be judged from its application to the business of *our* life. Any view of the truth beyond this application, or inconsistent with it, is not a knowledge for us. Accordingly, I feel myself peremptorily recalled from adopting such a notion of the divine foreknowledge, as would suppose any event to be *necessarily* determined and unalterable: for this is a notion of which I cannot act according to those principles of deliberation and repentance which I find in my constitution. I need not deliberate; for I cannot effect any thing:—I need not repent; for there is no place of repentance. But if I confine my view to a simple notion of God, as the Supreme Disposer of events, whether past, present, or future; without perplexing myself with difficulties, which I cannot solve, as to the *manner* of his disposal of them;—I then feel myself on sure ground: for I then feel

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my piety and my activity stimulated;— I am induced so to use the events of life as to convert them into lessons of holiness;— into calls to repentance: for God is over all; and all things must, so far as he is concerned, work together for my good. Whether a past event *could have been* otherwise; or whether a future one *must be* as it has been foretold; are questions with which I have no concern. This *has been*, or *is*;—it was God's will;—therefore let me thank and praise God, and learn from it a lesson for my future conduct. This *will be*, as his word assures me;—it is God's will;—therefore let me be prepared for the result,—let me surely expect it;—let me repent in time,—and the evil, if it will be foreshewn, shall come, whenever it does come, without evil to me.

He then that had ears to hear the solemn warning of our Lord, delivered in the words of our text, would thus have received it. He would have been struck with the pathetic recurrence to his past ungracious acts towards the sacred person

of Jesus; and, believing his word, now for the last time repeating its despised admonition, would have repented, and escaped the severity of the impending vengeance, at least in his own person. He would have been among "the elect"<sup>b</sup> that were saved in that great and terrible day of the Lord; when,—instead of the present gentle messenger of God teaching in the streets of Jerusalem the things belonging unto her peace,—the avenging sword went through the land, bitterly arbitrating between the Lord and his rebellious people.

But this apostrophe of our Lord to the impending sorrows of the holy city, was not simply a call to repentance,—it was a *final* one. He was now about to shake off the dust of Jerusalem from his feet, and never more to plead with her as he had done before. "Behold your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that

<sup>b</sup> See Matt. xxiv. 22. Mark xiii. 20.

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cometh in the name of the Lord." Hitherto he had been leading the people of Jerusalem to repentance by acts of goodness: he had been entreating them to come to him. "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?"—had been the tone of his merciful expostulations. But now there was an end of such entreaties and expostulations. The time of judgment was at hand, and the announcement of that time was the closing act of that series of mercies with which they had been blessed.

There is then a period at which the sinner is left in a manner to himself—deprived by those helps which have hitherto been indulgently granted to him. God, indeed, is ever merciful—long-suffering—~~not~~ willing that any should perish; but ~~that~~ all should come to repentance; and will ~~be~~ refuse no convert, at whatever time the prayers and the works of faith may come up before him and solicit his forgiveness. *But there is a time*, when, after that he

has called, and man has refused—when he has stretched out his hand, and no man has regarded,—but all his counsel has been set at nought, and his reproof slighted,—he desists from his gracious importunities:—when, though sinners may call upon him, he will not answer—though they seek him early they will not find him:—“for that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord, they would none of his counsel, they despised all his reproof.”

Then it is, that sinners are said to “eat of the fruit of their own way,” and to be “filled with their own devices.” Then it comes to pass, that “the turning away of the simple slays them, and the prosperity of fools destroys them.” Such was that situation of the world at large, when God destroyed it by a flood. Such was that of Esau, when, having profanely despised his birth-right—the heir-ship of the Divine promises,—he “found no place of repentance.” Such was that of the Canaanites, when their iniquity was full, and their land

<sup>k</sup> Prov. i. 24. <sup>l</sup> Heb. xii. 17.

vomited them out. Such was that of the unhappy Judas, when, his worldly schemes having been frustrated <sup>m</sup> by the condemnation of his Master, he “went and hanged himself.” Such was that of Jerusalem, when the Messiah, whom she had despised and rejected, turned his face from her. Such is that, in various degrees, of every person who has *delayed* to bring forth fruits meet for repentance. As he *delays*, he comes into a *worse* state than that in which he was before:—both his desires after repentance, and his power to repent, diminish: until at length nothing remains to him, but a “fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation<sup>n</sup>.”

<sup>m</sup> Judas evidently did not intend to betray his master to death. He was disappointed when he found that Jesus was condemned; and under the vexation and distress of this disappointment went and hanged himself. His suicide was the last act of a worldly spirit. He had sacrificed his friend and gained nothing. He repented accordingly of his act of unkindness in respect of its unhappy consequences; but does not appear to have repented of the worldly spirit which led to it.

<sup>n</sup> Heb. x. 27.



But, as I have already pointed out, his very reduction to this state is a vehement call from God, to repent at last. God, indeed, is leaving us when we come to this state, but he is also calling us after him, at the very moment when his favour is about to depart. To those who heard our Lord's pathetic remonstrance, coupled with the dread intimation, that Jerusalem should see his face no more, until that awful period of desolation, when she would in vain long to behold him "coming in the name of the Lord,"—what could have been a more urgent appeal? The ears of those who heard it not, must have been deaf indeed, and their hearts hardened indeed, whom so touching an admonition could not reach.

The instruction, accordingly, which I would deduce from this most interesting passage of Scripture, is;—that we must neither *reckon on* the continuance of the Divine grace to us, *after* a perseverance in rejecting the call of the Gospel; nor yet ever *despair* of grace to repent, though we may have hitherto delayed,—if we delay

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~~no more.~~ Our situation is one of increasing difficulty, as our repentance is procrastinated. We tempt God's mercy. We provoke him to leave us to ourselves. Sin familiarizes itself to us more and more;—it fortifies itself more securely within the heart. Propensities which have been indulged without restraint, gain undue strength, and overthrow the supremacy of conscience. So that more is to be done, with less prospect of Divine assistance, as we remain insensible to the pressing invitations of Christ in his Gospel. But at the same time, desperate as our case may seem to become, we are forbidden to despair. A deep conviction of the desperation to which we are reducing ourselves,—if we are not already reduced to it,—is a message of peace, rather than of wrath, to the humbled and contrite sinner. Only let us forthwith,—at the instant when we feel this conviction,—“turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in our hands :” let us not suffer a moment to intervene between our present despair and our hearty repentance : for,

"who can tell, if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" "Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up."

Tremble therefore "ye careless ones;"—you that are living in idle hope of a day yet distant, when repentance shall bring you home to the fold of Christ; when your present insensibility to his gracious offers of holiness and peace with him, shall be forgotten in the sighs and tears of a *future* repentance—tremble at the thought of that destitution of the Divine grace into which you are heedlessly rushing. To be forsaken of God!—what an abyss of misery does the very thought open to our view? It needs no futurity, my Brethren, to disclose the horrors of that hell which is implied in such a state of destitution. It is a darkness that "may be felt." And yet

Jonah iii. 8, 9. Hosea vi. 1.

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to this darkness of desolation, the contemner of the Divine Counsels revealed in Jesus Christ, is willing to commit himself. He is content to leave the work of the day to be done in "the night wherein no man can work,"—to wait for the setting ray of the Sun of Righteousness, to sow the seeds of a life, which can only flourish under the influence of his meridian warmth. Is there indeed an *opportunity* for every thing else that is done in the world, which, if once lost, no regret can bring back: and is there no such *opportunity* for repentance? Do we find that *the time* for particular actions of our life, never passes away?—No. And where then is our ground for thinking, that the day of grace will never pass away. Be assured it will pass away. Nature leads us to *expect* that it will. Scripture *assures* us that it will. If we know not in our day the things which belong unto our peace, the time will come when they will be "hid from our eyes," and our house will be left unto us desolate:—when we shall in vain say,—what we refused

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to say whilst the Lord was actually pleading with us, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."

There is moreover a consideration which as connected with this subject, I would impress on your notice. It is this. Supposing that you could ensure the continuance of Divine grace in order to your ultimate repentance; you cannot suppose that you will even thus retrieve your lost ground, as candidates for a Christian immortality. Heaven begins to the faithful even while they are on earth: for "godliness hath the promise of the life that *now is*." You that *delay* therefore to be "godly," so long as you delay, so much you lose of your novitiate of immortal happiness. You have at any rate sacrificed some portion of that preparatory course of discipline, on which your future interest depends. You cannot expect a more abundant harvest than according to the extent of the fields that you have planted. The ground that you have passed by and suffered to lie waste, will only produce an unhappy crop,

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~~But~~ wherewith the mower filleth not his hand,  
~~nor~~ he that bindeth sheaves his bosom."

Persons are apt to think of heaven simply as a common receptacle of the blessed, into which whosoever enters must be *equally* happy. Consequently they believe, that the qualification requisite for this place of blessedness may be acquired at any period of life, or even at the very close of life; since it must follow that whoever really comes to God in faith, will be accepted by him, at whatever time he may come. This persuasion is strengthened by an appeal to the case of the labourers in the vineyard who received the wages of the day's work though they began their work only at the eleventh hour of the day, and sometimes by reference to the case of the penitent malefactor on the cross. True it is, indeed, that whoever is admitted into the presence of God must be happy, and that none will be excluded who present themselves on the stipulated terms of the Gospel. All will receive the promised gift of God—eternal life through Jesus Christ—who come to him through Jesus Christ—whether they have

been favoured with the early light of divine truth, as the Jews were nationally; and as the forward Christian is individually;—on they have only been brought late to that light; as the Gentiles were as a body; and as the late-repenting Christian is individually.—But this does not imply that all will be *equally* blessed, though all may be heirs of Christian immortality. With respect to whole nations, indeed, it is the case: since “God is no respecter of persons;” but, in every nation, he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him<sup>9</sup>. The Gentile though called late comparatively with the Jew, when once he was called, was put on a par with the Jew. But in the personal religion of individuals living under the common light of the Gospel, it is not so. The question then is:—Is the kingdom of God *within us*? It is not, whether we have a certain passport into the kingdom of God, but whether that kingdom is more or less established *within us*. In whatever state the

9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.

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kingdom of God is found to be within us, when we die; that is our state of acceptance with God. They who have admitted Christ more intimately into their heart; who have acquainted themselves more fully with the nature and laws of his kingdom; will possess more of Christ, when he shall appear in glory, as "their life." Though therefore it is impossible to say, how much may be done by individuals, in the intensity of their repentance, to retrieve their lost ground; the general rule is, that they, who would attain the highest blessing of the glorified saint in heaven, (and who deserves the name of a Christian; that has not the ambition of being among the brightest "jewels" of the Redeemer's crown?) must begin their work of repentance from the earliest period of their serious reflection; and so must go on repenting, and "growing in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," to the end of their probation.—Let him, who omits to repent *at once*, be as-

See Mal. iii. 17.



sured, that he voluntarily foregoes at any rate a part of his happiness in eternity.

You, on the other hand, who are weary and heavy-laden, — conscious of having long neglected the gracious calls of mercy; and who feel that you cannot lift up so much as your eyes to heaven—but are forced to say only—“God be merciful to me a sinner:”—be comforted by the assurance that you are not yet cast away from the hope of the Gospel. Come unto him who is able to give rest unto your souls: for his arms are yet open to receive you, though it be now the eleventh hour of your day. Believe, that the time is at hand when your house will be left unto you desolate: but believe it not so *now*. Fully anticipate your destitution of the Divine grace; for the Divine dealings manifested in Scripture warn you to expect such a crisis: but beware of fixing a season, which “the Father hath put in his own power.” Your rule is, to act as persons, who “know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” to take vengeance on

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the sinner : neither to confide rashly in your present state ; as if the day of desolation were not at hand : nor to despair ; as if it were *already* come.

Nor again suppose, that you yet ~~may not~~ have time to work out your salvation, and to obtain for yourselves an inheritance among the most glorious saints of God. Trust that, in proportion to the sincerity and earnestness of your repentance, grace will be vouchsafed to you to do the work of the Lord. “ For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of.” If you “ sorrow after a godly sort,” “ what carefulness” will it not work in you, — “ what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal !” Resign not therefore this hope. But dare not to think, that you will have either time or grace to repent, if you further try the long-suffering of God. Your difficulty is great. You have before you the work of eternity to be done, you know not in how short a time.

‘ 2 Cor. vii. 10.

‘ Ibid. v. 11.

"Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind; be sober; and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children; not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance; but as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;"

"1 Peter i. 13—15.

## SERMON XII.

### CONSTANCY IN REPENTANCE.

HOSEA vi. 4.

O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away.

IN reading the history of the chosen people of God, we cannot but be continually struck with that stubborn and rebellious spirit, which such signal providences of God—such prodigies of heavenly mercy—were not sufficient to bow down in humble submission to the Divine will. Though God was ever stretching forth his hand in their behalf, either to scatter their enemies before their face, or gently to lead them by the way as a faithful shepherd tending his flock—they were still, as their

Prophets describe them, a stiff-necked, back-sliding people. When he filled them with good things, they were satisfied and thankful to him at the moment: nevertheless, "their heart was not right with him; neither were they stedfast in his covenant." They were ready to confess, while the impression of his goodness was fresh on their minds, "The Lord he is the God—The Lord he is the God"—but immediately they forgot the Lord who had "redeemed their life from destruction, and crowned them with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

In their history accordingly, amidst the divine instructions with which it abounds, we have the following two facts presented to our consideration:—on the one hand, the great long-suffering of God, which induced him to bear so long with a stubborn people—on the other hand, the irresolute and uncertain goodness of man, which such a constant repetition of merciful acts could not suffice to establish. These are expressed in the words of Hosea, which I have just read to

year. At the time when they were written, indeed, the iniquity of the chosen people had risen to such a height, that the work of dismemberment had already prepared the way to their future rejection. Ten of the tribes had seceded, with Jeroboam at their head, from the sceptre which God had established, and set up for themselves an independent kingdom<sup>a</sup>. This is here meant by the Prophet by the name of Ephraim, whilst the two remaining tribes are comprehended under the name of Judah<sup>b</sup>. The Prophet accordingly represents God, as expostulating with each people on their instability of purpose; and under an anxious suspense of mind as to the course which he should adopt with regard to them. "O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto

<sup>a</sup> 1 Kings. xii.

<sup>b</sup> Hosea prophesied in the reign of Jeroboam the Second, the son of Joash, over Ephraim, or Israel, as the Ten tribes are mostly called after the separation, probably about 150 years after that event; and during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, to the third year of Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."

Let us consider the interesting truths here brought before our notice, and endeavour to derive from them an admonition to ourselves. For the same corrupt human nature, which rendered Israel so obdurate under the continued mercies of God, still operates to the hardening of the hearts of Christians under the manifold blessings which they receive at the hand of God: and the same bountiful Giver of all good things still displays his long-suffering towards men—still is ever repeating his gracious calls to us to repent and amend our ways, notwithstanding our constant relapses into sin. We may wonder indeed at the case of the Jews—we may say to ourselves, that, had we been in their case—had we experienced such great mercies as they did—we should not have acted so ungraciously and inconstantly:—but we overlook entirely our own circumstances: we omit to reflect, that we are daily receiving like demonstrations of the provi-

dential goodness of God ; and that we are still very far from loving and obeying God as we ought. The outward form indeed of the blessings vouchsafed to us, is of a different nature from those which the Jews received ;— God does not specially interpose now for temporal good as he did in their days ;—but it is still the same fountain,—though it flows in different channels,—of which he gives us liberally to drink : and we are accordingly no less culpable than the Jews, if we do not cleave to him with all our hearts, and with an undeviating steadiness of devotion to his service.

In considering that view of God presented in those expostulatory words ;—“ O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee ?—O Judah, what shall I do unto thee ?”—I observe, first, that this continued interposition on the part of God—this unceasing manifestation of his love towards the sinner,—so far from being derogatory to the Divine Perfection, is, on the contrary, a striking evidence of it. It shews that the sentence which God inflicts



at last on the sinner, is as it were extorted from him, and that, even when the sinner dies in his sins, his Maker and Judge may be said to be unwilling that he should die. His mercy never tires, but goes along with his justice even in the last unhappy moment of the sinner's final reprobation.

Herein the beneficence of God surpasses human kindness in an infinite degree. It seems out of our nature, to pursue with love and benefits, a person, who shews himself entirely ungrateful towards us, entirely regardless of our wishes, and a profligate despiser of our counsel. The human heart becomes sick at repeated disappointment; when all its anxious endeavours to do good are frustrated—when, instead of a blessing, it receives only taunts and upbraidings: and in despair it at length abandons an attempt, which experience has proved to be utterly fruitless. But it is not so with the goodness of God. He considers whereof we are made; he knows that we are but dust and ashes—that we have corrupted our ways upon the earth. He deals with us, as with creatures in whom he has

already been disappointed, (if we may apply this term to an Omniscient Being), at the very outset; when our first parents fell from their perfect purity, and dashed in pieces those living tables of the Divine commandments, the principles of a nature formed in the image of Deity. This, indeed, was a shock, which might have alienated him for ever from the children of Adam. For, it was no single transitory error that had been committed, but a stain had been infused into the very nature of man—the nice adjustment of the inward principles of the human constitution had been disturbed—and a mischief, for ever irremediable by man, had been perpetrated. Here then, if on any occasion, Divine goodness would have receded from the earth, as too polluted for its reception. But if, in this sad extremity of our condition, God still visited us with consolation; we may reasonably trust that no subsequent transgression, the fruit of that original sin which obtained the boon of Redemption, will have force to turn away the divine regard altogether from the sinner,

In the "depth of the riches of the wisdom" manifested in the sacrifice of the only-begotten Son for the salvation of the world, we find an inexhaustible fund of forgiveness, though we may have trespassed against God "until seventy-times-seven." God indeed cannot look on the impure:—he, who in himself knows "no variableness, neither shadow of turning," cannot abide with those whose goodness is transient "as a morning cloud" or "the early dew." But there is One standing continually before him, on whom he looks with joy, and for his sake pities fallen man;—there is in heaven, even in the bosom of the Father, "the Lord our Righteousness," in whom God may consistently with all his perfections, overlook the fleeting, perishable, goodness of every other son of Adam.

Such then is the Divine Goodness. The same purpose of Redemption runs through all the Divine conduct. The gift of the Redeemer is never for a moment forgotten. God never ceases to think of us in Christ. He has not been content to give up his Son for our sake, but he has also with him

“freely given us all things.” He has not made one great effort; and then desisted from his gracious undertaking of love; but he has proceeded in accumulating blessing upon blessing—favour upon favour. He has made the Atonement of Jesus Christ on the Cross, the great Corner-stone, on which he has continued to build a corresponding structure of mercy. Having made us his sons by adoption, he has moreover followed up his adoption by acts of paternal affection, pitying us, “like as a father pitieth his children.” Such then should be the goodness of man. We feel our own unworthiness: and we repent, accordingly, and cast our hope of salvation on him, in whom we can behold God as the Forgiver of Sins. Agreeably then to this our primary act of goodness, should be our subsequent course. We must add repentance to repentance, and faith to faith. Our Christian progress must be continuous;—not consisting of several scattered fragments, as it were, of holiness, but one entire un-

\* Psalm ciii. 13.

broken tissue. There must be a *oneness* in our Christian profession; even as the who has called us to salvation is *one* in all his dealings towards us. Such ought, I have said, to be our good message. But how different is it in fact from this! Contemplate, in the next place, a lively and just picture of it, in the prophet's description of Ephraim and Judah:—"Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away." The morning cloud breaks and disperses as the day advances. The early dew is drunk up by the rays of the rising sun, and disappears. So, the softening of the human heart,—(for this is what the Prophet here intends by the "goodness" of Ephraim and Judah,)—our contrition, or tenderness of spirit, whilst we are impressed with a conviction of God's great mercies towards

\* It is the same word in the Hebrew which is translated "mercy," in a following verse—"I desired *mercy* (or goodness,) and not sacrifice." Hos. vi. 6. It seems opposed to hardness of heart, or insensibility under the Divine mercy.

us,—is of a temporary, evanescent character: instead of strengthening and advancing, it disperses and vanishes, as the beams of Divine mercy continue to shed their influence on us. How often have we formed earnest resolutions of repentance and future improvement, and as often repented of our repentance, and returned to that very unfruitfulness of which we had been ashamed! There have been occasions probably to all of us, when the word of God has pierced deeply into our souls, searching the unsound conscience, and impelling us to seek anxiously for that balm, which alone can heal the wounded spirit. To some perhaps, providential events of their lives, have been the means of awakening Christian reflection in their minds. Others again have not needed any striking occurrence to arrest their attention; but,—with an ear open to the voice of God speaking in every thing around them, and a heart sensitive to the impressions of Divine goodness,—have not deviated, in any instance, from the strict line of their Christian calling, without feeling compunction,

nor without anxious desire to "turn from the wickedness that they have committed, and do that which is lawful and right." Still, all are found in the ways which they have renounced again and again. Their perseverance is in their iniquity, and not in their repentance. The softening of their heart may be "a day of darkness, and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains"—but with the morning cloud it vanishes. The tears of repentance may fall in plenteous drops, watering our paths in the world with their wholesome moisture—but they are only "early dews;" beautiful in their hour; but soon dried up and gone.

Is it that the Divine grace is ineffectual to the end for which it is indulgently vouchsafed? It is impossible to admit such a supposition for a moment. When Saint Paul found it hard to struggle against that natural infirmity by which his spirit was humbled, and "besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from him;" the answer he received, was—"my grace

is sufficient for thee ; for my strength is made perfect in weakness\*." In like manner, whatever may be the infirmity under which any other disciple of Christ may be bowed down, the Divine grace is "sufficient" for him;—and "the strength of God may be perfected in his "weakness. In one sense indeed, the grace of God never operates in vain. It is never without some strengthening influence on the heart of the individual, though that individual may perversely resist and grieve the Holy Spirit, and quench his holy fires. Grace may have *ultimately* been bestowed in vain. The heart which has been visited with Divine consolations, may *ultimately*, as experience unhappily proves, remain only a "heart of stone." Christ may "stand at the door and knock;" but no answer may be returned to his voice: the "door" may remain closed ; and Christ therefore "comes" not "in" to that heart ; and the unholy recusant "supers" not with Christ nor Christ with him. Still, the

\* 2 Cor. xii. 7-9. See Rev. iii. 20.



very appeal of the Spirit to the heart is *strength in itself*. The awakening from sins which it produces, though the sinner may relapse into his fatal slumber at the next instant,—the good resolutions which it puts into the mind, though these resolutions may be immediately forgotten, and the thoughts of God, and of the Life Eternal, which it suggests, though these thoughts be only marks on the sea-shore, which the next wave effaces,—are evidences that the Divine grace *in itself*, is never unaccompanied with strength to the receiver of it.

To the natural dulness of the human heart, then, we must ascribe the fugitive character of that repentance which in too many Christians is made the substitute of a real Christian repentance. Even when a determination is formed to repent, it is not from the love of that unto which we repent, as from uneasiness at the past, from experience of the little fruit that we have had in the things of which we are now ashamed. Our repentance is rather, a simple renunciation of our former ways;

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than a conversion to the spirit of the Gospel. It is sought as a vent to the sighs of a heart, which sees how lovely Christianity is, and yet loves its own ways more. And thus our repentance itself becomes a snare to us. We repent again and again, and yet are no better Christians. For the repentance which we perform, is not such as is "not to be repented of."

I would therefore most earnestly entreat of you, my Brethren, to make yourselves thoroughly acquainted with the nature of that repentance, to which the message of the Gospel calls you; in order that your "goodness" may not fall under the reproach of the Prophet, in being only "as a morning cloud" and "as the early dew."

It is not then, be it remembered, a single act, or any number of single desultory acts. It is the Atonement of your Saviour, breathed from your whole heart—confessed by your whole life. It is conscious infirmity leaning on the staff of the Divine mercy,—conscious unholiness clothing itself

in the righteousness of a Perfect Redeemer. It is vitally and inseparably connected with the work of Redemption, for it is by virtue of the Redemption that it obtains its value in the sight of God. This is the reason, why it cannot consist in any single act, or in any number of single desultory acts; but is the continuous act of the whole life of the Christian. If it were a mere sorrow for the past, without relation to the sacrifice of Christ; then, it might consist of several detached parts perfect in themselves. But as it is, the beginning of repentance is no beginning, unless it is the beginning of our taking up our cross and following the Redeemer. We are not really conscious of an infirmity which needs the Divine mercy, or of an unholiness which needs the purification of redeeming righteousness; unless we proceed to acquire, by our consequent efforts, an interest, in the mercy to which we profess to look, and in the righteousness of which we desire to participate. Our hearts are not really softened, unless our "goodness" expands and diffuses itself in our future actions. The Sun of

Righteousness is not rising in our hearts, unless his shadows are cast before him; in their length and breadth, over the course of that life which he comes to illumine.

Whenever accordingly you feel yourselves stimulated to repentance,—whenever you find the blessed effect of the operation of the Holy Ghost on your hearts, bringing your past actions before your view in their natural unworthiness,—content not yourselves with the simple feeling of sorrow for the past: but search and see, whether you are bowed down in spirit before the Cross of your Redeemer. Your sorrow perhaps is only the sorrow of the world,—the working of disappointed vanity,—the dejection of a mind, priding itself on its own dignity, and mortified at its inferiority, when referred to the ideal standard by which it has measured its own excellence. In such a case, your repentance is entirely unconnected with the Gospel. It has no stay. It cannot abide the heat of the day.—It is perhaps grounded only on fear of the Divine

displeasure. You are conscious of having transgressed the commandments of God, and either anticipating, or actually beginning to feel, the unhappy consequences of your disobedience, are driven, by the necessity into which you are brought, to implore forgiveness. Here again is no repentance which the Gospel recognizes. The motive vanishes with the disappearance of immediate danger; and your repentance is seen no more, until the accumulation of your guilt again awakens your fears.—Perhaps it is the simple dissatisfaction, arising from a conviction of your imperfect adoption of the rule of life, which the Gospel prescribes; without an accompanying deep sense of your inherent sinfulness, or any craving after the grace of redemption. Finally, let me declare to you, the worthlessness—the unscriptural character—of such a repentance. It falls short of its aim. It reaches not to that sorrow which is the characteristic of true repentance. The repentance which is written in the Bible, is, as I have pointed out, the repentance which brings the sinner to the Cross of

the Redeemer—producing a transition from the state of death to that of life with God. This repentance is a real change of mind. By it we become continually “new creatures;” “putting off concerning the former conversation the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and are renewed in the spirit of our minds, putting on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness;” thus accomplishing more and more our baptismal engagement, inasmuch as we perfect by it, that “death unto sin and new birth unto righteousness,” to which the Holy Ghost has sanctified us in the laver of regeneration. It is a change from death to life, and not only this,—but from holiness to holiness—A—from life to life. If we are in actual sin, it transforms us to the holiness of the Christian;—if we are already in a state of holiness, it renders us holier still:—if we are already justified by faith in Christ, it increases our faith; it confirms our justification. It is possible indeed to fall even

\* Eph. iv. 22—24. Col. iii. 9, 10.

from such a repentance. It may be, *after* in, only as a morning cloud, or as the early dew it may go away. For even the most advanced Christian has need to take diligent heed, *lest he fall*. That great example of Christian repentance, the Apostle Paul, was fearful lest, after that he had preached to others, he should himself be cast away.<sup>1</sup> Though he was a Saint indeed, he laboured to “keep under his body, and bring it into subjection.” He felt that he had an antagonist to contend with, in himself, as well as, without himself, in the world, and also in the power of Satan, against which it behoved him to keep himself armed in “the whole armour of God.” And so will every Christian penitent feel. He will not take up an *assurance* of his continuance in the good work which he has begun; but he will *strive* that he may continue in it. He will remember, not only the example of Saint Paul, as a caution against relapse into a state of sin, but the words of that Apostle, as well as of Saint

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 27.

<sup>2</sup> See Eph. vi. 10—17.

Heb. vi. 4—6.

Peter\*, pointing out the hopeless case of those who, having once embraced the Gospel, and tasted the word of life, have afterwards forsaken their profession; and will beware, lest he “fall from his steadfastness.” But his repentance is *by its nature* such as will abide. It is not a morning cloud, or the early dew; but it will *endure*, under the influence of the Divine grace; until its human weakness shall be made perfect in the strength of God; when “the Lord God shall wipe away tears from off all faces;” and there shall be no more repentance, because there shall be no more sin.

\* 2 Peter ii. 20, 21.



# SERMON XIII.

THE PRESENT LIFE THE YOUTH OF IMMORTALITY.

ECCLES. xi. 9.

Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes : but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.

THERE are two leading divisions of the information delivered in Scripture :—the first, comprising all that has been revealed respecting the Great Being, whose existence Nature declares to us ;—the second, comprising all that has been revealed respecting the nature and condition of man himself. The latter knowledge indeed flows from the former and is included in

it; since, all that we are told of God, is information of his dealings towards us, and consequently instruction as to the end and nature of our own being in the world. Thus it is, that Scripture connects our future happiness in heaven with the circumstance of "*seeing God*:" an increased knowledge of him being necessarily productive of an improvement in our own condition. Still the two subjects are capable of being viewed distinctly from each other, as component parts of the scheme of Revelation: and require indeed to be so viewed that we may give each article of Scripture Truth an immediate consideration, proportioned to its practical importance in itself.

Now the first inquiry which must occur to every reflecting mind relative to our present condition in the world, is:—What is the nature of that condition in which I find myself placed? Is it my whole being? Am I to think that my whole interest, as a rational creature consists in its enjoyment? Or has it a relation to any future state,

which imparts to it a more important character, than it possesses when regarded simply in itself? This is a question, to which every one who thinks at all, will be deeply concerned to obtain a satisfactory answer. It is one on which, he will feel, that his mind must be made up without delay; for he cannot stop from acting on one persuasion, or the other, respecting it; and the whole complexion of his actions will vary, according to the persuasion which he adopts. If the present life be determined to be his all, the perfection of prudence consists in actions limited to present advantage;—if the present life be only a part of his existence, actions having their end in this life, become the height of imprudence.

This question then has been set at rest by the Scriptures. In acquainting us with that wonderful fact in the dealings of God, I. That God has sent his Son into the world, to take upon him our sins and to become our Redeemer,—they have also made known to us the reality of a life after death—that life, to which we have been redeemed by

this gracious act of Divine interposition. Before the act of Redemption, there could have been no *certain* information concerning the question of a future state; since we are only made heirs of immortality, in consequence of what Jesus Christ has done in our behalf. There was hope in the mercy of God—there was expectation of a life after death, founded on God's providential disposition of things in the course of nature—but there was no decisive evidence, that the present life was not the whole interest of our being, antecedently to the purchase of immortality for us by the blood of Christ. The Scriptures accordingly, which tell of that precious ransom, are also the express and unanswerable vouchers for the Life Eternal.

The Christian, therefore, is one who is fully persuaded, that the importance of the present life consists, in its connexion with a future invisible state. And, when once he is persuaded of this fact, what an engaging and serious aspect does the present life assume in his eyes? It is as the youth of his immortality—the appointed period, in which;

certain actions are to be performed, and a certain character is to be acquired, in order to that eternal state to which it is introductory. Why is the period of youth so interesting to us, considered only in a temporal point of view? It is not that this stage of life is *in itself* preferable to any other, but because of the immense importance of it in reference to our whole subsequent life. We look forward to the period of manhood and of active exertion which is soon to follow, and are anxious to know, whether a fellow-creature will so pass through that eventful period, as to qualify himself for the part which he will have hereafter to act on the scenes of the world. The young, as not yet conversant with the ways of men, we regard, as comparatively innocent; and we dread the fatal misuse of present opportunities only to the increased corruption of the heart, instead of their being applied to the formation and strengthening of right principles of conduct. We fear, that the young man, indulging in the joyousness of the present hour, may walk in the ways of

his heart, and in the sight of his eyes;" and thus may find too late that, "for all these things, God will bring him into judgment."

Such then is the interest, with which, every real believer in the doctrine of a life after death, will regard the whole present life. The Christian clothed with the natural corruptible body of flesh and blood, is the young man who is hereafter to assume the robe of manhood, when, putting off the body, he shall put on incorruption and immortality. He will regard himself, as one who stands on the most critical point of his existence; having, so long as he lives in the world, leisure and space, for inuring himself in those habits which are essential to his interest in eternity: as a novice, who has, by the study of God's word, and by learning the manner of that life to which it directs his view, to initiate himself in the kingdom of God. And he will fear, —in like manner as he fears for the young man of the world,—for himself, as the young man of eternity,—lest he mispend the present season in idle thoughtless indul-

gence, and God should hereafter bring him into judgment."

This is the view, which every one who is truly enlightened by the Gospel of Christ, will take of his present condition. The instruction, therefore, of the text, whilst it primarily applies only to the season of actual youth, may, not unaptly, be extended into a warning against a forgetfulness of the future life, amidst the occupations or delights of the present.

Contemplate your present life as a part of your immortality. Youth, in being the beginning, is also an essential part of our whole life. So is the whole present life, in being the beginning, also an essential part of our immortal existence. And what an accession of importance does it obtain from this notion of it? Take the most protracted life of man;—take even the periods of patriarchal longevity;—and how little appears the sum of our years, when we consider each duration only as a *whole in itself*? Glance to the supposition

of a duration in which a thousand years are but as a day, and wherein countless thousands remain to be evolved after thousands have passed before. Into such a duration enters the life of man, when once it is begun in this world. It is the commencement of that which shall never cease. What an ennobling view then is here before us, of this our mortal life! How awfully impressive is the consideration, of that having been called into being, which shall never be annihilated! To form some conception of this, read the first chapter of Genesis, and observe, whether you are not forcibly struck with admiration, at the majesty of a narrative unfolding to you the beginning of all things. When you reflect, what an amazing scheme of infinite Providence, was suspended on that first moment of creative energy; how unspeakably grand is the simple information; "IN THE BEGINNING God created the heaven and the earth!" An awe pervades the mind as we read the account, which no object of definite duration, though surveyed in all the parts of a long-continued existence, and however



magnificent as a whole is capable of exciting. Such then is the character of dignity with which our present life is invested, when, by the instruction of the Gospel, we behold in it, in like manner, the first moment of an immortal creation. Already indeed, to those who thus regard human life, "this corruptible puts on incorruption, and this mortal puts on immortality."

Descend with this notion into that field of active duty, in which your particular station in the world demands your presence. Let all your actions bespeak a commencing immortality. Shall you die daily in your conduct, during those very moments, when you are, according to the law of your being, beginning to live for ever? Shall you labour only "for the meat which perisheth," when you have need of "that meat which endureth unto everlasting life?"—The conduct of the Christian who accommodates his actions to the Christian view of human life, will often indeed to the worldly appear trifling and unimportant, or even imprudent and absurd. "Fools will account his life madness and his end to be

without honour." It may seem strange to some, that he is so scrupulous about things apparently indifferent,—that he so little regards what the generality prize so highly,—that he "runs not with them to the same excess of riot,"—that he practises self-denial,—that he "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord." For it is unhappily too true, that the life immortal, however acknowledged as a tenet of our religion, often attracts the eye of curiosity,—if not the finger of scorn,—as if it were some new and impossible doctrine,—when it is preached in the present actions of the Christian. The heir of immortality, however, will not be deterred from his course, by the scoffs of practical infidelity. He will not disjoin two existences, which his religion teaches him to combine in one. What God hath joined together, he will not let man put asunder.

II. Contemplate further your present life, not only as the first part of an immortal duration, but as a part of a spiritual

existence. There is a very prevalent error, in conceiving the character of our present life, as well as in estimating its real greatness. Many seem to think it enough that they shall be spiritualized beings hereafter, without being renewed in spirit now. The present condition is regarded as the life of the flesh, whilst the future life is appropriated to the work of the spirit. They overlook the obvious truth, that those, who would live hereafter with Christ in his Father's kingdom, must sanctify themselves by an acquaintance with him here ; otherwise, they can know nothing of the manner of that life which is lived in the presence of God. "The Lord knoweth them that are his<sup>a</sup>." They for whom Christ first promised to go and prepare a place, that, where he should be, they might be also, were those who had conversed with him on earth,—who had forsaken all and followed him,—who had acknowledged him as their Master and Teacher in daily life. So, must all other disciples have made them-

<sup>a</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 19.

selves the familiar companions of Christ in the world, in order that he may prepare a place for them. The kingdom which the blessed shall receive, is said to be one "*prepared*," for them; and this implies that they have been previously known by their Saviour whilst they sojourned in the world.

Here then it is, where the analogy between our natural youth, as the period preparatory to our mature age, and our whole present condition in the world as the antecedent stage of our immortal existence peculiarly demands your attention. For here enters the notion of Discipline. Youth is, not only the commencement of that course of life on which we are afterwards to proceed, but is the time of our education for that course. So, our present condition is the education-time for that spirituality, to which we are destined in the world to come. We are born into the world helpless, ignorant, corrupt creatures; and we need, consequently, the acquisition of strength, and know-

ledge, and virtue, to enable us to perform our part well in the scenes of mature life. So, with respect to the future life; we enter on our present condition of being, under the bondage of sin, and naturally indisposed for that spirituality which is the end of our being; and consequently, we need to *acquire* a relish for the state on which we must enter. Whilst, moreover, we are naturally incapacitated for sustaining a part on the scenes of the world, we are endued with the power of acquiring the strength, and the knowledge, and the virtue, of which we stand in need. And that power consists in the discipline of habits. So, with respect to the life eternal, we have the capacity of improving in our acquaintance with God, of gaining greater ascendancy over the sinful lusts of the flesh, and of forming in ourselves a taste for spiritual things, by the like discipline of habits<sup>b</sup>. In our temporal capacity, our natural youth is the period,

<sup>b</sup> See these points, as well as some others touched in this sermon, admirably illustrated in Butler's Analogy, Part I. chap. 6.

in which such habits are appointed, to be exercised: in our religious capacity, as heirs of immortality, the youth of our present life, is the corresponding period of *spiritual* habits.

Are we then sowing to the spirit *now*? Are we using this world as a *discipline* in order to the world eternal and invisible? Are we exercising ourselves in all those habits, which tend to generate in us, a humble, and contrite, and sober, and patient, and watchful, spirit:—a spirit delighting in doing good: in waiting upon God in prayer and obedience to his commandments—a spirit, loving his word, and the redemption and sanctification, which it sets forth to us? Or are we thoughtlessly spending our time of spiritual education, either, as if we were already sufficiently prepared for the change which we are about to make, or, as if we had no need of preparation at all? “rejoicing in our youth, and letting our heart cheer us in the days of our youth, and walking in the ways of our heart and in the sight of eyes;” knowing indeed,—but not car-

ing to remember, and therefore not knowing practically at least,—“that, for all these things, God will bring us into judgment.”

The present life, it is evident to every attentive observer, is admirably fitted for that purpose of discipline, to which we are required to apply it. It is a melancholy truth, indeed, that to many it is, *in fact*, a discipline of unrighteousness, rather than of spiritual perfection. Many so use the passing events, as to convert them into occasions of their greater corruption; conforming themselves to the evil that is in the world, instead of exercising their strength in counteracting it°. But because in many instances the events of human life are so applied, we must not be induced thereby, to misconceive the excellent design of the great moral Governor of

“Indeed the present state is so far from proving, in event, a discipline of virtue to the generality of men; that, on the contrary, they seem to make it a discipline of vice,” &c.—Butler’s Analogy, Part I. chap. 5.

the universe. There is no evil permitted under his administration, without a wise and benevolent end in the permission of it. And we can distinctly perceive, that, whilst some give way to the evil, and are rendered worse by their intercourse with the world; others, by encountering that evil, are improved in their characters by the collision with it. So that the right use of the world is sufficiently apparent, notwithstanding its perversion in the conduct of the sinner.—And how could the Christian temper have been formed in any school, in which there was not the discipline of evil? How could the doctrine of Atonement have found a ready access to hearts, which had never been taught, by circumstances of the world, the lesson of humiliation? How could the necessity, of relying on the divine strength for support, have been impressed on us, without a condition of things, inculcating on us, to take heed, whilst we stand, lest we fall? How could the love of God and of future blessedness, have been instilled into a heart apt to love the things of the world; unless the world had had its



seductions counteracted by their inherent insufficiency and disappointment? How could the duty of walking by faith, and not by sight, have been enforced on us, otherwise than by circumstances which shewed the deceivableness of all earthly objects? Or the Gospel grace of repentance;—where would that have found place amidst scenes, that brought nothing but satisfaction to the heart of man; and where there were no signs of God's punitive justice, in the visible infliction of evil? And if then God has so excellently ordered the constitution of the world in which we live and act, for our spiritual improvement, is not his intention in that constitution abundantly evident to us?—his intention, namely, that we should make it subservient, as a *discipline* of our faith, and not regard it as that whose end is accomplished in its present enjoyment. Surely, we profligately cast away our opportunities; we profanely despise the merciful provision of God; unless we “so pass through things temporal,” as to lay hold by means of them, “of the things eternal.”

And the analogy, it is highly important to observe, between our natural youth, and our whole condition in the world, as heirs of immortality, holds still further, in this respect; that as we have in our natural youth, the guidance of friends and instructors, to assist us in rightly using that momentous period; so, we have the Scriptures with all the religious helps which they reveal, to speed us on our way through those circumstances of discipline which our life presents. In neither case have we been left entirely to our own prudence. As human counsel is provided for us during the period of our natural youth; so Divine counsel is specially provided for us as infants of immortality. The prudence of our elders is made to reflect its light on the first steps of our career in the world; the wisdom of the Ancient of days—of the Father of lights himself—casts its bright beams on our outset to the world invisible.

Now, we blame the young who neglect the admonitions which the experience of the old addresses to them. We sigh over

disappointed prospects in the child of this world. We grieve to see the precious moments of early life expended in vanity and indolence. And if we are further interested as parents or as friends, in one whom we behold insensible to the value of his early years, how are our hearts wrung with pain at the spectacle?

What shall we say then to those who neglect the precious seed-time of their spiritual life—who are deaf to the voice of their Divine Instructor and Guardian! What tears are due to the blighted bud of immortality! How heavy is the cloud which gathers over the morning of an eternal day! How aggravated is the guilt of those, who value not the help extended to them in their spiritual youth, when the infinitely greater importance of the issue depending on it, compared with that of their natural youth, is taken into account?

Be instructed therefore, my Brethren, by your own judgment with regard to the young, transferred to your own case. So long as you live insensible to the voice of your Saviour speaking to you in the Scrip-

ture, you are those thoughtless children whom you blame :—you are the profligate youths whose misconduct grieves your heart. Weep not for him who ruins his worldly happiness, by the criminal neglect of his youth—but weep for yourselves, for those, who, by still more criminal neglect, bring into jeopardy their everlasting interests. “ Seek ye the Lord while he may be found :—call ye upon him while he is near.” As you would implore his guardianship for a beloved child—as you would direct the young man to “ cleanse his way by ruling himself according to God’s word<sup>a</sup>”—so, confessing yourselves before God, as “ little children, not knowing how to go out or come in”—pray for yourselves, that he would give you “ a wise and understanding heart,” that you may “ discern between good and bad,” and come forth purified and improved by those scenes of the world which constitute your discipline. Remember the words of our Lord :—“ Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye

<sup>a</sup> Psalm cxix. 9.

<sup>b</sup> See Solomon’s beautiful prayer, 1 Kings iii. 6—9.

shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Refer in thought to those days of childhood, when you received, with docility, and simplicity, and confidence, the instructions of friends—and receive in this spirit the everlasting counsels of the Gospel. Thus coming to Christ and learning of him, you will go forward in the great work of preparation for the life eternal, with increasing vigour; until your course of discipline is finished, and you "come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ<sup>f</sup>."

<sup>f</sup> Eph. iv. 13.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION IN THE WORLD.

THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION, AS WE KNOW IT, FIRST  
CAME INTO THE WORLD BY THE GOSPEL. FOR THE  
GOSPEL IS THE MESSAGE WHICH THE FATHER,  
THE HOLY SPIRIT, AND THE SON, THE LORD, THE  
CHRIST, HAVE SENT TO THE WORLD. AND  
THE MESSAGE IS THIS: "GOD IS WITH US."

IN READING THE PASSAGE OF THE GOSPEL, WE  
ARE IMPRESSED BY A REMARKABLE SURPRISE, AND  
WE SAY TO OURSELVES: "IS THIS THEN THE CHA-  
RACTER OF THE RELIGION OF CHRIST?—WAS IT NOT,  
ON THE CONTRARY, ANNOUNCED BY THE VOICE OF  
ANGELS, AS—'GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND  
ON EARTH PEACE, GOOD WILL TOWARDS MEN?'—  
WAS NOT THE MESSIAH EXPRESSLY FORETOLD AS  
"THE PRINCE OF PEACE"?—WAS IT NOT SAID,  
THAT "IN HIS DAYS SHALL THE RIGHTEOUS FLOW?"

\* Also Luke xii. 49—53.

\* Isaiah ix. 6.

rich, and abundance of peace <sup>c</sup> ?"—and do we not read, that among the effects arising from a reception of his religion, should be "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness <sup>d</sup> ?" How can we apply therefore to Christianity the description of the text, and suppose it to be the introduction of the sword and domestic variance among men ?

There is however no real contradiction between this declaration of Scripture, and other passages which appear to speak in a different tone. It is not the purpose here of our Lord to describe the *nature* of his religion, but he is addressing his disciples on the errand on which he was about to send them forth, and preparing their minds for their reception in the world. He accordingly describes to them the effects, which would follow their attempts to propagate the Gospel amidst an evil and perverse generation. Those effects would in the first instances be peculiarly grievous and trying to the disciple. Whilst by some the Gospel was favourably received ;

<sup>c</sup> Psalm lxxii. 7.

<sup>d</sup> Galatians v. 22.

by others again it would be rejected. It would happen, that opinions would differ respecting it, among individuals of the same family. And thus the Gospel would make its way amidst dissensions and animosities. And at the same time, the faith of the preacher himself would be tried by the severe opposition which he would have to encounter. To the first diffusion of Christianity, accordingly, the description of the text peculiarly applies. But it was also further intended to acquaint all future professors of the faith of the Gospel, with what they had to expect, as such, from the world. By the insertion of the declaration in the volume of Scripture, all are warned to understand, that the religion of peace will not be necessarily accompanied with peace; but, from the passions of men, must in some respects be a sword, and even prove the occasion of dissension and violation of domestic charities. So was it intimated to the Mother of Jesus, when Simeon told her amidst his joy at the birth of a Saviour; "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a



sign which shall be spoken against ; (yea a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed ;” expressions, sufficiently indicating, that, whilst the blessing of the Saviour then born, was in itself all joy and peace, yet should it, from circumstances extrinsic to itself, be attended with personal suffering in those who received it.

Now, that the natural consequences of a religion should be excellent, whilst those which actually follow it are untoward and evil ; it is perfectly consistent to suppose. The *natural* consequences of a religion, are, such as would necessarily flow from its principles, were those principles suffered to operate freely without any outward impediment. The *actual* consequences are, such as arise from the conjoined operation of those principles, and the materials on which they act. To estimate therefore the real state of the case ; and to state the true result of any system of religion ; we must

• Luke ii. 34, 35.

deduct from its whole positive effect discernible in the course of the world, the reaction of those evil and obnoxious circumstances to which it is applied. We must look, in short, to its real *tendency*. All besides this, though inseparably combined with its diffusion, is merely accidental, and therefore not belonging to the consideration of its essential nature. If the tendency be good, then are the consequences of the religion naturally good, even in the most extreme cases, where the outward impediments to it may amount so far as to make them *actually* evil.

This is a distinction not peculiar to the subject of religion, but which applies equally to other subjects. We readily allow that the natural effect of reason is to give power over brute force. Yet can we not readily conceive reason placed in circumstances unfavorable as to nullify its natural effect, when, for instance, the force opposed to it may be so disproportioned to its means, or so aided by a concurrence of accidents, as to be an overmatch to its strength? And

do we not find, that even the better reason is sometimes defeated by the inferior; as in cases, where *rashness* has succeeded, by daring an attempt which real prudence forbade? or where a dexterous cunning has outreached the calculations of a sound discretion? So that the actual effect of reason does not necessarily agree with that, which we must allow naturally to belong to it. The same observation may be made with regard to the actual effect of virtue; virtue, I mean, considered as distinct from religion. Love, and honour, and advantage, naturally attend on virtue, and make her ways the ways of pleasantness and peace, even in a worldly sense. Men, though vicious in their own conduct, are disposed to admire and befriend the integrity of others; though regardless of the rewards of virtue or the punishments of vice, are disposed to rejoice in the prosperity of the righteous, as in that which is due to their righteousness, and, on the other hand, are indignant at the prosperity of the wicked, as at a thing *out of* the course of nature, and which *ought not to be*. Yet, from

ignorance of men's characters, as well as from a multitude of other circumstances, how often does it happen, that virtue falls of its proper reward, or vice of its proper punishment? How often accordingly are the actual consequences of virtue or vice, different from what we are entitled to expect from a view of their nature? So may we admit the proper effect of Christ's religion to be peace and joy, whilst it is often in fact accompanied with vexation and disquietude, or rather in no case is *entirely* a possession of comfort. So may, in certain cases, even extreme violence and domestic animosity attend on the publication of the "good tidings of great joy," without dishonour to the sacred message itself.

In one sense indeed the "peace" of the Gospel can never be perverted. As it is peace between God and man; (which is the proper notion of the term "peace" when applied to the Gospel;) no obstacles of the


\* See Butler's Analogy, Part 1. chap. 3.

world can render it discord and war. Here, the sword can never again be unsheathed. For God has made an everlasting covenant with man. When he accepted the Atonement of the Cross, he proclaimed a perpetual amnesty of our past rebellion. "In a little wrath," says God by the prophet Isaiah, "I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with *everlasting kindness* will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should *no more* go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but *my kindness shall not depart* from thee, neither shall the *covenant of my peace* be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee<sup>5</sup>."

But whilst the real peace of the Gospel can never be disturbed; for it rests on the immutable character of its Divine Author:

<sup>5</sup> Isaiah liv. 7—10.

the inveterate enmity of the heart of man refuses the terms of the peace descending from above; and puts the weapons of its own warfare into the hands of the herald of peace. And, so long as iniquity shall abound on the earth, this must ever be the case. For, to expect that any religion, however admirable in its internal nature, should meet with no opposition, and, by dint of its own excellence, should immediately obtain an universal success; is to expect, that it would be placed in circumstances, different from those, which it is given to improve, in being given to man. It is arguing from a more perfect state of things, than that which human life presents. In the case of Christianity moreover, it should be observed, such an expectation of immediate triumph, is in opposition to the very principle, on which the whole scheme of the religion is founded;—the fact namely, that mankind are in a fallen debased condition of being. It is to persons in a state of apostasy that its instructions are expressly addressed. At most therefore, it



can only be held responsible for a partial and tardy success in the world.

Still, we can hardly divest ourselves of that prejudice, by which we confound the natural efficacy of the Gospel with its actual external effects. We still expect from it more than we see resulting from it, and are offended, when we find, that it does not achieve those conquests, either over the world at large, or over the body of death in ourselves, which its nature promises. Looking at its divine perfection, and then at that representation of it which the theatre of its operation exhibits, we feel a disappointment not unlike that of the two disciples, when, on their way to Emmaus, they “talked together of the things which had happened,” and poured forth the sadness of their hearts, in those accents of desponding faith :—“ we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel <sup>h</sup>.”

But, instead of indulging in vain com-

<sup>h</sup> Luke xxiv. 21.

plaints against the apparent inefficiency of the Christian Faith, or against that untowardness of the world which frustrates its converting energy; let us endeavour to meet the peculiar exigencies of the condition in which we are placed, and to render the adverse circumstances of the world the means of cultivating and improving our own faith as individual Christians.

As individual Christians then, let us understand, that we are *militant* in the world. Our Lord has told us, that he "came not to send peace on earth, but a sword;" and so will each of us, in some measure, experience the profession of a faith in him. It cannot be entirely a "way of pleasantness and peace." There is war proclaimed against it, in the world abroad, as well as in each heart into which it enters. Destruction and unhappiness are in the ways of men; therefore, will they not receive a message of peace. There is in each individual a "law in the members"—an "infection of nature," remaining even "in them that are regenerated," which "is not sub-



ject to the law of God<sup>1</sup> ;” and which when that law tells of “ peace,” makes the answer of “ war<sup>1</sup>.” Hence it must be, that the faith of the Christian lives amidst constant alarms. The sword of the Spirit must be ever in its hand, to defend itself from violence and spoil.

I. If this be the true state of the case, an important question arises, which I would, in the first place, bring before your consideration. Are you maintaining your faith in Christ, as Christians militant in the world? Are you using the world, as a trial to your religious principles;—as the scene in which they are to be cultivated and improved, rather than enjoyed with tranquil and secure possession?

Christ has forewarned his disciples, that the peace belonging to their profession is not to be found unalloyed in the world. The Gospel is admirably designed for happiness, as well *now*, as hereafter; and it will infallibly confer present happiness,—so far

<sup>1</sup> See Article IX.

<sup>1</sup> Psalm cxx. 7.

as it is adopted insincerity,—no less than the blessedness which it promises in heaven. But it must be, in some respects, also, a *painful* profession now. If we are, therefore, too much at ease with the world, it is plain we are not doing our duty as Christians. The great satisfaction which we feel, belongs not to those who have an arduous post to maintain,—who are required to “watch and pray, lest they enter into temptation.” “Woe unto you,” says our Saviour, “when *all men* speak well of you<sup>k</sup> :” that is, woe unto you,—not when the just approbation of men accompanies your religious exertions,—but when those exertions are so directed, as to win the smiles and the favours of a world whose “friendship is enmity with God.” Either our faith is of that compromising character which exempts us alike from the open censure both of the religious and the irreligious ; or it is of that indolent character which attracts no observation from either class ;—so that we enjoy a

<sup>k</sup> Luke vi. 26.

deceitful tranquillity in the world—a peace which is not of the Gospel. Such is the simple unbending nature of a true Christian profession, that it is impossible that it should suit the taste of all men in a world so corrupt as that in which we live, if it be only displayed in its genuine colours. Neither, therefore, can the Christian professor himself—so far as he is consistent with his profession—be the favourite of the world. A lukewarm profession may be maintained in ease and supineness; an energetic faith calls for labour and pains.

Pause, therefore, my Brethren, to examine into the situation in which you stand with respect to the world. See whether you are acquitting yourselves as the faithful soldiers of Christ, fighting the good fight of faith; or timidly holding parley with the enemy, whom you have solemnly bound yourselves to resist unto death. The true satisfaction of your religion is only to be sought in victory—in that “victory which overcometh the world;” and not in servile acquiescence in the terms of peace which the world insidiously offers.

Your peace must be conquered. Victory over death and sin is the cause in which you are enlisted. The Captain of your salvation owns you as his on no other terms. You must follow him in his march of triumph.

It is no little practical consequence, be assured, in what light you view the peace of the Gospel. If, led by a notion of its efficacy to produce peace, or by those declarations of Scripture which promise to godliness the life that now is, you are seeking for peace in the world; you overlook the counteracting tendency of the world: and you use no exertion, consequently, to support and invigorate your religion. If, on the contrary, you take these promises of peace in the world, with those qualifications which the circumstances of the world impose, you will not expect a peace from it, which you have not *laboured* to attain. And you will *labour*, consequently, to *extort* the promised peace from the adverse circumstances of the world — you will make them your school-masters and guides, in spite of themselves, to the peace

of the Gospel. Whilst the indolent Christian is complaining of adversity in the world, or mistaking its prosperity for the sign of Gospel peace; you will be intent on disciplining and improving your faith by the circumstances in which you are placed, of whatever complexion they may be; and converting them into lessons at once of holiness and peace.

II. The next important use which I would suggest of the intimation of the text, is the consolation and encouragement which it conveys to the Christian amidst his struggles in the world. Shall we feel disappointed that, in holding fast our profession, we do not perceive that comfort which must naturally follow in the train of holiness? Shall we think that heaven will not be our portion hereafter, because we do not find a commencing heaven already within ourselves? Recollect, that our Lord has intimated, that he should not bring "peace on earth," but "a sword"—that his word will not have free course in the world, but must fight its way through

impediments. To expect great things of that commencement of happiness which is promised to the professors of the Gospel is to forget *where* it commences. It is to expect, whilst we are members only of the Church militant, the rewards which belong to the Church triumphant. Let not, then, the Christian "fret" himself of "because of the evil-doers," neither let him be "envious against the workers of iniquity." Let him not say in his heart, "Behold these are the ungodly who prosper in the world; they increase in riches: Vainly I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency." But let him take counsel at "the sanctuary of God," and he will then understand what he sees in the world. Let him "hold fast

"Virtue, to borrow the Christian illustration, is militant here; and various untoward accidents contribute to its being often overborne; but it may combat with greater advantage hereafter, and prevail completely, and enjoy its consequent rewards in some future states." *Butler's Anal.* P. 1. ch. 11.

<sup>a</sup> Psalm xxxvii. 1.

<sup>b</sup> *Ibid.* lxxiii. 13.

<sup>c</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

his integrity"—let him continue to trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for him. "For evil-doers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while and the wicked shall not be, yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace."

Further, when you look abroad into the world, and consider the desert state of the Lord's vineyard, contemplating with dismay the feeble interest which the divine message of pardon and peace excites among mankind—among those who know that their soul's life is implicated in it—do you feel the melancholy state of the case a difficulty and a trial to the steadiness of your own profession? Are you offended, that even blasphemy against that sacred name, at which every knee should bow, should be permitted by the holy Author of our religion? And—from the shock thus

Psalm xxvii. 9—11.

inflicted on those early and natural prejudices, which induced you to regard the doctrines of Christianity, as truths unquestioned, and unquestionable—are you unhappily brought into a fearful state of *doubting* respecting it, when you find that there really are scoffers and doubters in the world? Here, again, you may opportunely call to mind what our Lord has foretold, that his religion should encounter the passions of men, and become a subject of debate;—since he came not, he said, “to send peace on earth, but a sword:”—and, instead of joining yourselves to the profane disputers of the world, triumph over the temptation of their infidelity—by cleaving more closely to the cause which so urgently craves your support.

III. Thirdly, let the untoward circumstances of the world, as affecting the progress and the efficacy of Christianity, stimulate your own exertions to counteract them. Something has been left to us to do, to complete the success of the sacred cause. Our Saviour has led the way be-



fore ~~us~~. He has opened the gates of everlasting life for us. The Apostles and primitive disciples have acted as our pioneers, clearing away impediments and smoothing the roughnesses of the course. But still impediments remain. To the removal of these, our hands must contribute. We must co-operate with the work of God; each ministering with those talents which God has given him. The sword of the enemy is not permitted to go through the earth, to no purpose. It is your signal to stand; having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breast-plate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace, ~~as~~ above all, taking the shield of faith, where with ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked; and to take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." Things, indeed, must still take their course. Notwithstanding your most vigorous exertions, you must expect, that, so long as the world

before you

ed you on Ephesians vi. 14—17.

is what it is, evil will continue to obstruct the progress and the efficacy of Christian truth. It is your part, however, to strive against it. "Cast thy bread upon the waters, for thou shalt find it after many days." The *result* of every work is in God's hand: he will surely accomplish it in his good time: the *means* in order as it are in your's. The exertions of individual Christians in their appointed stations, appear to be the means, under Divine grace, by which the Gospel is retained at all in the world: and to be wanting, therefore, in such exertions is, to desert the Faith, to nullify, as far as lies in you, all that Jesus Christ has done in its behalf.

And consider, how much the interests of Christianity may be promoted by your personal example! Whilst the life of *one* man presents, at least, *an approximation* to that way of peace which is the proper effect of the Gospel; the multitude of *receptions*, which exhibit it only as a *brand* on earth, are comparatively insignificant.

For, were its consolations unreal, they could not bestow peace, in any degree, in any one instance. But, though all concurred in rejecting that peace which it offers them, and actually made it no peace to themselves; still, this is no presumption against its capability of bestowing real happiness:—for the case may be, as it is, a perversion of the proper effect, arising from causes foreign to the religion itself.

Finally, let the present disadvantages, under which the Gospel labours in diffusing its blessing, elevate your thoughts, my Christian Brethren, to that heavenly country which is the proper home both of the Gospel and its disciple: where “the flesh no longer lusts against the spirit, nor the spirit against the flesh;”—and where the proper and the actual effects of a true religion shall be found entirely coincident. If, indeed, amidst the confusion which prevails in the world, you discern clear indications of an essential happy tendency in the religion of

the Gospel ; you have, in this very observation, firm ground for believing, that, when present hindrances are removed, (as they assuredly will be in a future purer state of being,) "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," shall be all in all. Thus, it is only the language of sound reason, which the Scripture puts into our mouths, when we say in its words, that "we know that all things work together for good to them that love God". But, as a portion of the Canaanites were left in the land of Israel, to be "as thorns in the sides" of the chosen people, and to preserve them in allegiance to Jehovah—so is it with regard to the spiritual possessions of the Christian. He is not permitted to enjoy at once his inheritance undisturbed ; he is denied an entire satisfaction from even the purest profession of the Gospel, *now* ; lest he should cease to labour for the appointed rest of the saints, and forget, that "there is laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give" to all them "that love his appearing".

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii. 28.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 8.

the Gospel: you have in this very objective action, even from the position of belief, that when present hindrances are removed, (as they

## SERMON XV.

being, in the presence of which we all are, it is the presence of God which is the

### THE CHRISTIAN POLITY.

we say in our words, "We know that

PHIL. iii. 20.

that we are citizens of heaven, and our conversation is in heaven.

CHRISTIANITY, as founded on Judaism, and originally addressed to Jews, in delivering and enforcing its doctrines, adopts a tone of thought familiar to Jewish hearers. Judaism, indeed, was a divine education of mankind for the higher knowledge of that wisdom of God, which was to be revealed in "the latter days" by Jesus Christ. "The Law was the schoolmaster" both of Jews and Gentiles, "to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." The institutions of Judaism, ac-

\* Gal. iii. 24.

cordingly, were framed with predictive adaptation to the mysteries which they were designed to introduce: and hence the notions familiar to Jewish minds were not strained from their purpose, as mere accommodations to the evangelical subject, but became the natural language in which Christian truth expressed itself.

An instance of this excellent subserviency of Judaism to the teaching of Christianity, appears in the intimation of the text. Religion to the Jews was an institution of civil government: their religious and civil institutions coincided in principle. Jehovah was their Governor, not only by that invisible authority which he exercises over the conscience of every rational creature, but by a visible superintendence, as the dispenser of temporal rewards and punishments. Theirs was a national as well as a personal religion—a peculiar polity as well as a peculiar creed. The Jews accordingly, in the first place, and to all who rightly accepted Christianity as a continuation of Judaism, the description of Christianity, as a peculiar civil institution,

would convey an intelligible and lively representation of its nature. This notion, then, has been so appropriated by the Apostle,—"Our conversation is in heaven," he says to the Philippians; that is, our peculiar institution of life and manners, as a people of God, is "in heaven." As with Israel, the place where the Lord had chosen to put his name, and which was the seat of the theocratic government, was in Jerusalem; so, with God's elect in Christ, the seat of their peculiar government—the metropolis of their laws and institutions—is in heaven.

Taking, then, this view of Christianity, presented in the case of the Jewish Religion, let us more closely examine it. It will be found of excellent use in guiding us, at once, to a due estimate of our Christian calling, and of that scene of things through which we are passing. Let us observe, then, that Christianity is Judaism continued under an expanded form. It is the polity of the New Jerusalem, the "city which

both foundations, whose builder and maker is God." There still exists a body of men; insulated from the world by peculiar institutions, and dedicated to God; though no longer conspicuous as a temporal state, or outwardly eminent above the nations of the world; but a spiritual community—its citizens and freemen of heaven.—When the Lord called Abraham, and promised to make him a great nation; with the particular promise, he joined the evangelical declaration, that all families of the earth should be blessed in that Patriarch. Into the temporal and partial character of the Religion subsequently instituted, a perpetuity and an universality were also insinuated. It was declared that the institution of providential government then begun should never cease.—Judaism accordingly has both ceased, and not ceased. It has evidently ceased in certain respects. "The sceptre" is departed "from Judah," and the "lawgiver from between his feet." The Temple has scattered its ruins on the



destiny. The Holy Land is desecrated with the steps of strangers; and the posterity of Abraham are themselves strangers in the land which the Lord gave them for a possession. But there are living possessors of the evangelical promise—the heirs of the faith of Abraham—a spiritual Israel—a people, who date their origin, as a chosen race, from one of the seed of Abraham; and who are the actual depositories of the divine blessing announced at his call. “For ye are all,” says the Apostle to the Galatians, “the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For, as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” <sup>Gal. iii. 26-29</sup> True Christianity, therefore, we behold the perpetual duration of Judaism. Therein all their promises of everlasting continuance,

\* Gal. iii. 26-29. See also Gal. iii. 7. Rom. iv. 11.

which we read as attached to the religion of the Law, find their completion. "Jerusalem" that was, "is in bondage with her children ; but Jerusalem, which is above, is free, which is the mother of us all." Judaism, therefore, *as Judaism*, is dead ; but, *as Christianity*, it lives, and will live for ever.

Consider the changes in the nature of their condition, and of the obedience required of God's elect, involved in the transference of the seat of their government from earth to heaven. The same principle of a special providential government will appear to be carried on still, but modified in important respects characteristic of the New Jerusalem.

The children of Israel were separated from the rest of mankind. So is the Christian Israel. But the place in which the religious acts belonging to the separation of the former, were to be performed,

was a city "built with hands," and contained a visible temple, to which all the chosen were required to resort. The holiness, therefore, of the Jew was necessarily an exclusive privilege. It was impossible that all men of the earth could come to worship at Jerusalem, or that men of various regions could be brought to concur in manners and ceremonies with the inhabitants of a particular country. When, however, heaven is the place where the government of Israel has its seat—when the daughter of Sion is a city "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens"—when "the mountain of the Lord's house" is "established on the top of the mountains," and is "exalted above the hills; and all nations flow unto it;"—there is then no restriction of place—the hour is come, when, neither at Jerusalem, or at Mount Gerizim, (to which the Samaritans claimed the local sanctity of the Mosaic ritual), are any required to worship the Father; but they are commanded to worship him as

"a Spirit,"—as the invisible Lord of a spiritual kingdom,—“in spirit and in truth<sup>a</sup>.” Israel accordingly, when become a Christian people, is no longer one nation separated from others, but is a congregation of all nations separated from the whole world. Now, that the saying is fulfilled ;—“they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest<sup>b</sup> ;”—there is no ground of national or personal separation between men ; but all, without respect of persons, are separated to the Lord. All are forbidden to have fellowship with the world—the world of the corrupt flesh. All are called upon to live as strangers upon the earth—to keep themselves distinct from those who know not God—not to do after the manners of those who are about them—serving wood and stone—given up, that is, to the concerns and pleasures of a world sunk in apostasy from God, but to

<sup>a</sup> John iv. 20—24. <sup>b</sup> Heb. viii. 11.

regard themselves as a chosen people, "called to be saints," and fenced round with the peculiar ordinances of a Divine Law.

Virtually, indeed, the separation is the same both of the Jewish and the Christian Israel. Religion was the outer wall to the Jews, which marked out the boundaries of their land, and preserved to them their place among nations. No principle was more strongly inculcated on them, than that their strength consisted in the strength of God. The Divine strength, in like manner, is the strength of the Christian. It is that which enables him to hold his invisible eminence above the world. It is by the Spirit that he is led, when he becomes a son of God. By the same Spirit he has the will and the power to do, all that he does, as a disciple of Jesus Christ. In a word, it is the Holy Spirit which *Christianizes* him. But, whereas the religion of the Jew, was the means of an *external* separation from the rest of mankind; the religion of the Christian separates him from the world, by its *internal*

effects on the heart<sup>1</sup>. He lives after the *outer* man, as those around him—he avoids not intercourse with his fellow-men; “for then must he needs go out of the world<sup>2</sup>,” as the Apostle argues to the Corinthians: but, in the midst of his social intercourse, he is, so far as he is a Christian, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners<sup>3</sup>.” He is peculiar in his manner of life, as was the Jew; but this peculiarity no longer appears in the *form* of his actions, as the peculiarity of the Jew did, but in the *spirit* with which his actions are performed<sup>4</sup>. I do not mean to say, that he was a Jew, who was one outwardly only; (for there was a circumcision of the heart, as well as of the body, exacted of the disciple of the Jewish faith<sup>5</sup>;) but that his religion, as it referred to a visible kingdom of God, was necessarily evidenced by outward peculiarities. Whilst, on the other hand, the religious separation of the Christian, as referring to an invisible kingdom of

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxxi. 31—34.      Heb. viii. 8—12.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. v. 10.      <sup>3</sup> Heb. vii. 26.      <sup>4</sup> See Titus ii. 14.

<sup>5</sup> Deut. x. 16. xxx. 6. Jer. iv. 4. Rom. ii. 28, 29.

God in heaven, enforces no peculiarity in things belonging simply to the world. It is in things spiritual and heavenly:—"For we are the circumcision which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."—"For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

Such being the nature of that separation which belongs to the Christian Polity, the question which I would put to you, as forcibly suggested by this view of our condition under the Gospel, is this; Is "your conversation as it becometh the Gospel of Christ?" Are you holy to the Lord? "blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world?"

Deeply does it concern you, my Brethren, to answer the question satisfactorily.

<sup>a</sup> Phil. iii. 3.

<sup>o</sup> Rom. xiv. 17.

<sup>p</sup> Phil. i. 27.

<sup>q</sup> Ibid. ii. 15.



It is no less than to know, whether you are living as the faithful subjects of the Lord your God, or in actual rebellion against him. He has commanded you to acknowledge no other master of your thoughts and actions but his Holy Spirit. You are to live in exclusive subjection to this invisible power; for, by this power he dispenses the laws of that holy city in the heavens, into which he has incorporated you as believers in his Son. Are you, then, separating yourselves from the world, and living in communion with the Holy Spirit? If it be so with you, you are true members of the Christian Polity, and Israelites indeed. Otherwise, as I have said, you are in rebellion against God. You will not have him to reign over you. He has called you to the privileges of freemen, and you will not be free.

Why was idolatry so peremptorily forbidden to the Jewish people? Why was it made the great offence of the Mosaic Law? It was, because idolatry was against the principle of their separation from mankind as a chosen people. It overthrew their



whole polity. It was the setting up for themselves kings, "when the Lord their God was their king." To belong to a State, in which God deigned to be specially and immediately present, as its Head, was the distinctive mark of an Israelite; and to renounce this distinction by the worship of false gods, was therefore not only an act of impiety, but an act of disfranchisement from the privileges of a Jewish citizen. Accordingly, we find that the transgression of the people on this point became the prelude to their dissolution as a community. The breach that was made in the secession of the Ten Tribes was rendered irreparable, by the contemporary institution of the idolatrous worship at Dán and Bethel.

Thus it is with those members of the Christian Israel who pursue the ways of the world:—They go against the principle of their peculiar polity, and cease to be the Israel of God. The devotion of themselves to things visible and temporal, is as

1 Kings xii. 26—33.

idolatry to the ancient Israelite. Saint Paul particularly speaks of "covetousness" as idolatry; that is, of a worldly spirit in general, as equivalent to a setting up of idols in the heart. Christians are bound to live in the world, as not of the world. They are required "to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord<sup>s</sup>." "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth;" says the same Apostle: "for ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God<sup>t</sup>;" that is, our real and proper life is, where Christ has prepared a place for us in the mansions of his Father's house.

Do you then wonder at the gross idolatry of the Jewish people in worshipping the abominations of their neighbours? See their idolatry as to its principle, in the conduct of those Christians, "who mind earthly things." The latter no less dishonour the God who has separated them to himself, in bidding them, come forth from the pollutions of an evil world, and "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness".

<sup>s</sup> Rom. vi. 11.    <sup>t</sup> Col. iii. 2, 3.    <sup>u</sup> Eph. v. 11.

II. Thus far we have seen the nature of our separation as the citizens of heaven. I proceed to consider that view of our earthly condition, which results from this our citizenship.

The member of the Jewish polity was known as a *Jew* wherever he might chance to reside. He might be made a citizen of another state; as St. Paul, being a native of Tarsus, was also a Roman citizen as well as a Jew; but he still retained the name of a Jew,—a name, designating, not only his religion, as we may be apt to suppose, but also the peculiar *country* to which he belonged:—he still felt the ties which bound him to the land of his fathers, and recognized no other home but that which was the home of his Faith.

Conceive this home of the Israelite swept from the face of the earth;—contemplate Jerusalem of the land of Judah no longer decked in the beauty of holiness; and the Divine glory transferred to “the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven,” having “the

† Rev. xxi. 10, 11.

Lord God Almighty and the Lamb" as its Temple<sup>\*</sup>:—and how changed is the home of the people of God! They have no longer a home any where on the earth. Wherever their lot may be cast, there they live, as strangers and pilgrims, seeking "a better country, even an heavenly;" as knowing that God "has prepared for them a city<sup>†</sup>."

As members then of the holy City of God in the heavens, look, my Christian Brethren, to your proper home. This world is not your home. It is not the place for you to repose in ease and satisfaction, as if you had reached your ultimate destination. It is not a condition in which you may say to yourselves; "soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." Whilst you "eat your meat with gladness and singleness of heart<sup>‡</sup>;" glorifying God who has given you, of his abundance, to sustain and cheer you on your way; you

<sup>\*</sup> "And I saw no Temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple of it." Rev. xxi. 22.

<sup>†</sup> Heb. xi. 16.

<sup>‡</sup> Acts ii. 46.

must eat it, at the same time, as the "Lord's Passover," "with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand," and "in haste," as those who are on the point of quitting a temporary habitation. You must remember that, however pleasurable that habitation may be, it is only your land of sojournment—a wilderness, through which your way lies to a promised home.

Such is the view which Scripture presents of our present condition on earth. And is it not verified by every one's experience? Ask yourselves, whether you have felt throughout, in any period of your past lives, that rest which belongs to the feeling of home; or whether, on the contrary, you have not discovered, as you have been more fully acquainted with the condition of man in the world, multiplied indications of the instability and unsatisfactoriness of your present state. I do not require you to say, that you have found no enjoyment in this life: that is not the point here concerned: and, indeed, it must be owned, that

\* Exod. xii. 11.

that in his goodness he infused a great deal of goodness among his creatures, even in their present state: he has not, we have seen, by which and pruned only thorns by the way-side. But he has also scattered many a flower in our path. What I ask is, whether you are not forced to confess: that nothing which you now enjoy is perfect in itself. That your greatest happiness here is imperfect and defective: that it wants something additional to render it *a whole*, and betrays therefore its own insufficiency in the heart of man. Examine into your present delights—into those, for instance, which result from the exercise of the amiable affections of our nature. How are even these alloyed by concomitant pains, and deprived of their perfection! Observe, how the happiness which a parent feels in the child of his bosom, is disturbed by that anxiety which accompanies the strong feeling of affection;—or how the delight attached to the performance of deeds of benevolence, is impaired, by observation of the little good effected by the most strenuous exertions, against that spirit

of evil which walks through the earth, desolating it with iniquity and misery;—or how even that “joy in the Holy Ghost,” which the true disciple of Christ feels from the exercise of his faith, is overcast with the shadows of our present condition, when even the holiest Christian must plead the imperfection of his best services, the coldness of his love towards God, the selfishness of his charity towards man. So clearly does experience bear its testimony to the assertion of Scripture, that this present world is not our home. By instructing us, that it is a law of Divine Providence, that no human enjoyment shall here attain to perfection; it leads us to look forward with expectation to some other place as our proper domicile. Scripture has confirmed this expectation, and added the animating intelligence, that the home to which we look “is in heaven.”

And shall we be regardless of our high privilege as the citizens of heaven? Shall we forget the home where Jesus Christ waits to receive us, as in the kingdom

prepared for us, after that the appointed period of our sojournment shall be completed? and, instead of holding ourselves in constant readiness for the day in which he shall open the gates of the everlasting city for his ransomed; shall we dissipate our time in riotous living, or in stupid indifference to our final interests, in a land wherein we are only as "wayfaring men?" What would you think of the heart of that man, who should be so engrossed with the delights of a foreign country, as to forget that he has calls of duty and of tenderness to another place, and to domesticate himself among strangers? Would you not consider such a person, as one that had abandoned his proper sphere of duty, and sacrificed, at the same time, his highest pleasures to transient gratifications? Just so must you judge of yourselves, when, though convinced that you are only sent into the world that you may prepare to leave it,—that it is not really good for you to be here—that you are adopted into an abiding constitution of things in heaven,—



you are content to bound your views by the limits of this visible scene, to be so exalting them to be better than I think; On the whole, what an interesting view is here before us of the state of the world under the Gospel! The Christian Church is now the Israel of God. "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ." "We to are all one in Christ Jesus." Favoured as was the immediate family of Abraham at a former period of the Divine dispensations, equally favoured are *all men*; now that, in the fulness of time, all that was temporary and partial in Judaism has vanished, and the principles of that religion, no longer confined within the pale of a local institution, have obtained their expansion. As surely, as there is now no longer any place on earth where the Lord has chosen to put his name—and as the City and the Temple to which his people are required to resort, are in heaven;—so surely, is there no one nation now which the Lord loves more than another. The place of holiness is *without* them all. It is the *common* home

of all. None can boast of having been *born* free of the New Jerusalem. The freedom of it has been conferred on all alike “without respect of persons.” “For, ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words;” \* \* \* \* “but ye are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the First Born, which are written in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel<sup>b</sup>.” “See” then my Brethren, as the Apostle immediately proceeds to infer, (after having thus eloquently pictured the glorious privileges of the Christian Israel,) “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For, if they es-

<sup>b</sup> Heb. xii. 18—24.

caped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven. \* \* \* Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved<sup>c</sup>, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear<sup>d</sup>."

See Dan. ii. 44.

<sup>d</sup> Heb. xii. 25—28.

## SERMON XVI.

### THE CHRISTIAN CONCILIATING THE WORLD.

LUKE xvi. 8.

The lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations.

No intimation of Scripture is more express than this;—that the world is not that which the disciple of Christ must seek to make his friend. Its friendship is denounced to him as “enmity with God<sup>a</sup>.” And yet that passage of the Gospel which I have just read to you, would seem to indicate, that it is the part of a Christian, in some sense, to cultivate the friendship of the world. For, it exhorts us to make to

<sup>a</sup> James iv. 4.

ourselves friends, of, or (as it may be more properly translated) out of, the mammon of unrighteousness; and, what is still more remarkable, founds the exhortation on an instance of, a person securing the favour of the world, without scruple as to the means which he employs for the attainment of his end. In what sense, therefore, the friendship of the world may be conciliated by the disciple of Christ, becomes an important inquiry. To this inquiry a due consideration of the instruction contained in the text will afford us a satisfactory answer.

The expressions of the text, it may first be observed, refer particularly to the use of riches. The mammon of unrighteousness there spoken of, is a Hebrew idiom for worldly possessions. And the reason of our Saviour's remark being particularly addressed to the use of riches, and not in general to the things of the world, is to be sought in the circumstances of those to whom he spoke. There were among his hearers, those who prided themselves in riches, without regarding their proper use

—considering themselves as the rightful owners, and not the stewards of their riches—persons, who valued themselves on pretensions to which the Gospel was a stranger; “justifying themselves before men;” whereas “that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God<sup>b</sup>.” As he had, in his former discourse in the preceding chapter, preached against the self-righteousness of the Jew<sup>c</sup>, and shewn that human works in themselves were worthless before God: so he now further teaches the vanity of all human possessions, exclusive of their relation to God as their Giver, and of their consequent employment in his service. But the expressions, though particularly alluding to the rich persons who heard him, apply, in their spirit, to the use of the world in general—directing us to a Christian use of those circumstances in which we are placed, whatever they may be.

Taking them in this general sense, I shall proceed to illustrate to you, by the

<sup>b</sup> Luke xvi. 15. <sup>c</sup> See Sermon X. p. 221—222.



passage now before us, the nature of Christian intercourse with the world.

A steward is described in a parable, as accused of having wasted the goods entrusted to his care; and, under the fear of being put out of his stewardship, thoughtfully planning with himself the means of securing a retreat, in the event of his dismissal. One expedient occurs to him, and then another; and, at length, he fixes on one, which he instantly executes. He directs the different debtors of his lord, to deliver a reduced statement of their respective debts: with the view, as it seems to be implied in the parable, of making his deficient payments to his lord coincide with his receipts; and thus escaping detection in what he had wasted;—or, in case of detection, of conciliating the good-will of those, whom he had relieved of a portion of their debts, and implicated in a common fraud with himself. The parable does not expressly say which of the alternatives succeeded. The concluding words, given in the text, are only,—“The lord commended

the unjust steward, because <sup>d</sup> he had done wisely : for the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light." In the first instance, the lord commends the steward, in *ignorance* of the injustice practised—his approval referring simply to the satisfactory statement, which, on inquiry being instituted, the steward had been enabled to make of his accounts, by the expedient adopted. If, on the other hand, the lord is supposed to have detected the fraudulent reduction of the debts due to him, and yet to have approved the conduct of the steward; he expresses his admiration of the *prudence* displayed by the steward in anticipating the consequences of a dismissal. I

Such is the prudence which is held up

<sup>d</sup> It is the same conjunction in the original, which is translated, "because," in the first clause—and "for," in the second; and both clauses may be remarks of our Saviour himself, as the relater of the parable. As the passage stands in our translation, the commendation of the lord is certainly connected with a knowledge of the unjust expedient of the steward:



to the reproof and admonition of the children of light. Those who have the light of the Gospel to direct them through the paths of the world, are required to take shame to themselves, that they are not as wise in their generation, as this child of the world is described to have been in his. Those who have the use of the world permitted to them as a stewardship from their Lord in heaven, are instructed, in like manner, to employ their stewardship, in obtaining to themselves a home, when they shall be deprived of it.

Wherein then lies the excellence of that wisdom of the steward, which is here set forth for an example to us?

It is clearly in this; that he had *fully made up his mind* to a removal from his stewardship, and *used the opportunity* which the possession of his office afforded him, before it was lost to him for ever, for *providing* himself against that event. The stewardship itself he regarded as no longer his; but he resolved, at the same time, to make it *the means* of procuring him

hereafter, necessarily excludes every unholy action. So that we may safely take the example of the parable, as a specimen of that wisdom which we are required to evince in our capacity as Christians. The impurity and worldly-mindedness of the precedent vanish, when we look from the little precincts of a case belonging to this world alone, and transfer the instruction of it to a case embracing the present and the future worlds. Our Lord, indeed, might have clothed his instruction in an instance, in which there was no such blemishable conduct united with the prudence which he commends to our example. He might have given us a sketch of, a person steadily pursuing his worldly interest, without deviating in any respect from the rules of morality. But such an instance would not have had the point, which we perceive in that of the unjust steward. He wished to place conspicuously before men, the importance of that wisdom which seizes with a strong hand the advantages offered in the present condition for securing everlasting happiness;

and, therefore, it seems, presents to us an instance, in which prudence appears the master-principle of conduct; making every obstacle yield before it in the pursuit of its object.

As Christians then, learn, in the first place, that you have an immense interest in those circumstances of the world in which the Providence of God has placed you. They are means of grace to you—opportunities which must be employed with thoughtfulness and activity, for procuring friends that shall hereafter welcome you to everlasting habitations.

The steward in the parable *acts* on a presumed certainty of his dismissal from his post. He does not suffer himself to be deluded by a hope of his lord's indulgence; or trust to the emergency itself to suggest some expedient; but he reckons upon his dismissal, as if it had already taken place; and *provides* against it as inevitable. He determines to be on the safe side; and, therefore, devises a remedy

against the worst that can befall him. The wise Christian, will also consider, that he holds his stewardship of this world's blessings on a like tenure. He will reckon on being put out of his stewardship. He will not think that he enjoys his present situation in the world at his own will; or that he can prolong his continuance in it, for a single moment beyond the pleasure of his heavenly Lord. He will remember, that he knows not at what hour his Lord may call on him, to "give an account of his stewardship, that he may be no longer steward;"—and that he has reason to expect, when he reflects on his past misconduct, as one who has wasted his Lord's goods, that he may be dismissed to ruin and misery. What he justly anticipates as possible, he will consider as certain, and guard against it, whilst it is only in prospect. Feeling the immense importance of the issue depending on his removal from his stewardship, he will mould his whole plan of life in accordance with the expediency of the case. For, even though he should suppose the alternative of a ruinous dismissal from his

stewardship to be only remotely possible, it still becomes the part of prudence to act upon the certainty of it, when the immense importance of the event is taken into consideration. Though the chances of escape were infinite in comparison with that of a dismissal to everlasting misery; yet, as the thought itself of such a dismissal is so intolerable to human nature;—is it not the wisdom of a child of light, to anticipate even the slightest probability of it? Imitate, therefore, my Brethren, this child of the world, in his wise forecast of his dismissal from his stewardship. Reckon yourselves, as not sure of a day or a moment. Already behold yourselves put out of your office. Contemplate your misery as surely impending. Take your measures as expecting the worst.

II. But the steward in the parable, whilst he made up his mind to the loss of his stewardship, *used* his stewardship whilst

\* See Clarke's Evid. of Nat. and Rev. Religion, Prop. xv. p. 297. 8vo. and Butler's Analogy, Part II. Chap. vi.

it remained to him, in preventing the evil consequent on the loss of it. In his capacity as steward, he calls his lord's debtors, and makes that arrangement with them, by which he secures their favour eventually. It was the power which he then possessed, that enabled him to confer the obligation on them ; and he laid hold of the favourable opportunity. Like him, Christians must not only reckon on the loss of their stewardship, but must make it the means of procuring them friends against the day of dismissal. To this point, particularly, refers the strong admonition of our Saviour : " And I say unto you, make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." The present scene of action is the stage, on which our testimonials for admission into the kingdom in heaven must be obtained. Assured that we are on the eve of being removed from it, we must direct all our thoughts to the right use of that interest, which our temporary possession of it places in our hands. Though

as Christians, we have "our conversation in heaven," and must live therefore as those who have no real abiding interest in present things ;—yet we must look with a keen eye to those circumstances of the world in which we are placed, and actively employ them to our good. That we *may* make friends to ourselves out of them, is declared by Christ's admonition to us, calling upon us so to do. And, accordingly, we must take a certain degree of interest in them. In our zeal for the glorious things of the invisible world, we must not despise the humble things in which we are immediately present, so as to suspend those exertions about them, which may obtain their friendship in our behalf on the day of our trial.

And here we may observe, how the instruction of the Gospel conspires with the dictate of our nature. On the one hand, we feel no entire satisfaction in the greatest blessings of our present condition—we are made sensible, by daily experience, that, as disciples of Christ, we cannot obtain a cordial reception in the world :—and Scripture accordingly lifts up our hearts

to the joys which are in the presence of God. On the other hand, in attempting to separate ourselves entirely from temporal things, we find our nature reclaiming us to them;—though we desire a better country than that in which we have been born and nurtured, we still love our native world with all its storms, and clouds, and ruggedness. And it is, therefore, a relief to our heart, to be taught by the word of God, that we may, in a certain measure, take an interest in the world;—not, indeed, loving it with that love with which its own children love it; but with the love of the children of light; earning its good-will for the life eternal.


“ For, he that is faithful in that which is least,” (our Saviour proceeds to observe, after exhorting us to make to ourselves “ friends of the mammon of unrighteousness,”) “ is faithful also in much; and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that



which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?" Unless, that is, we make diligent use of those deceitful and transitory possessions which we enjoy in this world—those goods, which are not really our own, but are held by us only as the stewards of God—we cannot expect that the "true riches" of the invisible world,—those goods, which are really our own, as given to us for ever and ever,—will be committed to us hereafter. Had the steward in the parable suffered his stewardship to expire, without applying it to the purpose of providing for himself, he would have found no friends to receive him into their houses. Neither will the Christian, who suffers the circumstances of the world to pass away without providing for himself out of them, find any to welcome him into "everlasting habitations."

III. Moreover, it greatly concerns us to notice that point in the worldly prudence here held up to our imitation,—the securing a refuge *at all events*. The steward made

every thing bend to this object. As Christians, then, let us be checked by no impediments whatever, in providing for our eternal good. Let us make every thing in the world bend that way. Every thing else must be valueless, when compared with this one transcendent object. As the steward of an earthly lord, in prosecution of a secular end, sacrifices the concerns of the spiritual world—caring not for the principles of justice, and honesty, and candour, so that he can gain his personal safety;—so do you, my Brethren, as heavenly stewards, sacrifice your secular interests to your spiritual one. As this worldly person was worldly throughout, and consistent with himself;—so be you spiritual throughout, and consistent with yourselves. He was unholy in his means, in order to an unholy end:—be you holy in your means, in order to that holy end which is before you. His wisdom was praiseworthy, because it was admirably adapted to the end in view:—so let your wisdom savour of that holiness which you desire to attain in the kingdom of heaven, that it may have the



praise of God, and you may be called truly wise in your generation. For your wisdom is the fear of God, from first to last. As true Christians, you have deeply felt the need of conciliating to yourselves a Friend, in the event of your dismissal from the present scene of your occupation. You have thrown yourselves on the mercy of One, without whose intercession, you feel that you have no hope of entering the everlasting habitations of God. Let every action, then, of your lives facilitate and reinforce that intercession of your Redeemer, on which you rely. Let it earnestly plead with him, and ingratiate you with him, that he may triumphantly intercede with the Father for you, and confirm to you the salvation vouchsafed through his merits.

To conclude—Look on yourselves, my Brethren, as stewards of God in all those things of the world which are before you. Degrade them not to their mere earthly use, for they are God's; and must be so applied as to contribute to his glory:—waste them not, for you must hereafter

give an account of them :—despise them not, for they must be made your vouchers to your claim of everlasting life through Christ. Think not that your devotion, as Christians, is discharged by prayers and holy thoughts alone : but glorify God by your lives also, in all their parts,—by the unintermitted prayer of actions, done in that station of life to which his Providence has called you,—done as to the Lord, and not to men. “ Whatsoever you do, do it heartily as to the Lord, and not to men<sup>f</sup> :” and the Lord will surely accept it, as a Christian oblation—as an offering of a sweet-smelling savour, wherein he delights. In all your intercourse with the world, “ be ye, wise as serpents, and harmless as doves<sup>g</sup>.” “ Brethren, be not children in understanding : howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men<sup>h</sup>.” Enter into the business of the world with a wise and understanding heart ; as knowing that you are “ set in the midst of so many and great dangers, that, by reason of the frailty

<sup>f</sup> Col. iii. 23. <sup>g</sup> Matt. x. 16. <sup>h</sup> 1 Cor. xiv. 20.

of your nature, you cannot always stand upright ;”—and that, without constant watchfulness, you cannot but fall :—enter into the business of the world, therefore, with a lively interest ; but carry into it the guileless spirit of the children of light. Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness : but remember, at the same time, that the friends you seek of the world, are such, as may, “ when you fail, receive you into everlasting habitations.”

## SERMON XVII.

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THE CHRISTIAN CONVERSING WITH GOD IN THE  
WORLD.

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MATT. VI. 28.

Consider the lilies of the field.

THE world, from being the natural enemy of the Christian—that which alienates him from God, and deadens him to the life immortal—is converted into his friend, by a wise use of those opportunities of working out his salvation, which it presents to him. Though its possessions are termed by Christ, “the mammon of unrighteousness;”—yet, may these frail, and treacherous, and unholy possessions become the materials, out of which we may build up ourselves in the Faith,—and the passports to the true riches which “neither moth nor rust doth corrupt.” If the world is evil, yet good is



set against the evil. Whilst temptations to sin abound in every thing around us, there are also in the same objects, inducements to holiness.

Thus, though we cannot take our measures of Christian faith from what we commonly hear and see in the world—though to those who give themselves over blindly to its guidance, the world is a discipline of unrighteousness rather than of Christian holiness—yet, if we are disposed to apply it to Christian purposes, it may tend to improve and strengthen our religious principles. We may, in fact, regard it as a book of divine instruction spread open for us by the hand of God; wherein, those who read with an understanding heart, may find wisdom and edification; whilst those who give to it only a superficial attention, receive from it their hardening in folly.

Now, that the world was intended to serve this purpose of Christian wisdom and edification amidst the evil seductions with which it abounds, is sufficiently evi-

dent, as well from an attentive observation of it in itself, as from the whole tenour of the Scriptures. The Scriptures throughout presuppose a right use of those means of forming and improving an acquaintance with God, which the circumstances of the world present. We are supposed by the nature of the revelations contained in them, to have duly attended to those notices of God which are given in the course of his natural Providence. That "honest and good heart," which is described as the right qualification for receiving the word of God, is the temper formed upon a docile reception of the divine law written on the tables of nature. And thus our Lord himself continually refers his hearers to their past instruction in the ways of divine Providence; desiring them to apply the principles, already learned from familiar instances in the world, to the new truths which he unfolds.

The text affords a striking instance of this subserviency of the world to an acquaintance with God. Our Lord is there



instructing the people in the necessity of surrendering themselves exclusively to God; of relying on divine Providence for their support and comfort, in such a manner, as to renounce all vain confidence in themselves, and all painful anxiety about the goods of the world. He bids them accordingly, first, "observe the fowls of the air:" how "they sow not, neither reap, nor gather into barns;" and yet are sustained by the universal Father; and then, (as if to remove the objection that the force of instinct was that which produced the effect in this instance,) he immediately shews, that it was not by "*taking thought*," that the necessary comforts of life were obtained to man,—by an instance drawn from inanimate nature. "Consider," he says, "the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you,


O ye of little faith?" As if he had said—  
'Consider the natural course of the Divine Providence in the production and preservation of the lilies of the field:—it is evidently by that special Providence, which I am now unfolding to your minds, that they are nourished and clothed with so much loveliness; for, of themselves, they are incapable of that labour and thought, which appear so efficient in the case of human nature:—as you see, therefore, in these, the manifest operation of the invisible hand of God,—as it is impossible to believe that they depend at all on any care of their own for their preservation,—so think you, that your preservation also, at every moment of your existence, rests on the sustaining power of your heavenly Father:—for, though the possession of thought, and volition, and active principles, may lead you to confide in your own exertions, yet, you cannot but be assured, that such confidence would be but an arrogant presumption, when you observe in plants—things which obviously possess no such powers—the same effects produced, which,

in your case, appear the results of human contrivance and design.'

How engaging and irresistible is the appeal thus made! The divine instruction, so conveyed, speaks to us in the natural language of our own perceptions. Instead of regarding the doctrine of a particular superintending Providence as a hard saying; we begin to look upon it as a certain truth, which only requires to be duly considered, in order to be fully admitted. For we find, that it is only an extended application of a principle, to which we have already, however unconsciously, assented; and we readily accept it, as a just extension of a truth, which experience has instilled into our minds.

As we live accordingly in this world a twofold life—a natural and a spiritual life,—so, it appears, every thing around us has a corresponding twofold adaptation. Whilst it suffices for the daily occasions of the present temporary stage of existence, it also conveys a secret food adapted for the nourishment of the inner man—

of the spiritual, immortal part of our nature—to the life everlasting. For thus in the text, our Saviour directs his hearers, to “consider the lilies of the field.” He calls their attention to something to be learned from a beautiful production of nature, beyond what meets the eye of the casual observer; teaching them, that the outward beauty of the plant is not more intended by the wise Creator to delight the sense, and excite a transient admiration, than to prove—that there is an invisible Providence by which the world is sustained, and on which it is the wisdom and the piety of man to lean with devoted confidence. So, again, even the transactions of our daily life have not satisfied their purpose, by simply occupying our attention as events of the world: they are pregnant with spiritual instruction to those who will apply their minds to the development of it. We obtain, for instance, some important benefit through the kind instrumentality of a friend—or we observe how, in most cases, the advantages of life are derived to us, not



by our own exertions singly, though much generally depends on ourselves, but by the co-operating and mediating influence of others. How divine a lesson is involved in this ordinary occurrence of life! It is no less than an instruction to us, to lift up our hearts to that all-sufficient Mediator and Intercessor, without whom we can do nothing, and who has mercifully patronized and befriended us in our greatest need. So truly has the Royal Preacher observed: "Wisdom crieth without, she uttereth her voice in the streets, she crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the opening of the gates of the city she uttereth her words\*."

If, then, there is this speaking energy in the things which occupy us during our present life;—it is as much our duty to make use of that moral instruction so graciously provided for us, as it is to enjoy any other advantages which the good Creator has attached to the circumstances of our worldly condition. If God has so

\* Prov. i. 20, 21.

ordered things, that they may bring us near to him, by illustrating to us the method of his dealings, and confirming the truths of Scripture,—it surely cannot be a matter of indifference, whether we partake, or not, of this spiritual repast; whether we will listen, or not, to that familiar language which he has made an instrument of daily communication with himself. “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”

It is true, that this divine instruction, resulting from the circumstances of the world, speaks not intelligibly to all; to the unchastened and irreligious, as well as to the pure and pious mind. For it is addressed to the heart: and where the heart, therefore, is not softened and cultivated,—where those principles of our nature, which have survived the shock of our fall, are not suffered to exert themselves freely, but are overwhelmed and stifled by sinful habits,—there is nothing congenial with the spiritual admonitions which the world contains—nothing responsive to the voice of God in nature. But, because the dull heart cannot receive the lessons of sacred

wisdom, which nature reads in our ears; let us not suppose, that they are expressed in accents difficult to be understood. They require, in fact, no greater ability, in order to their due perception, than that which every humble-minded Christian possesses in the possession of a humble, and docile spirit.

I. First, it is evident, that the voice of God speaking in the world cannot rightly be understood without due consideration. The divine instruction, which our experience conveys to us, does not obtrude itself on our attention; so that we must perceive it, whether we are disposed to listen to it, or no. It calls for serious and devout reflection. "*Consider*," says Christ, "the lilies of the field:" and so just before; "*observe* the fowls of the air." He appeals to objects familiar to the sight; but which, it seems, had not yet been seen in their full importance; and demands of us a more close and accurate observation, that we may elicit their latent wisdom. In this case, then, we clearly per-

derive the effect of *consideration*. The divine moral contained in a common fact of experience, immediately expands itself to our view, as the light of thought acts intensely on it. The mystery of a superintending Providence, and the consequent duty of entire reliance on that Providence, are then developed to us in a simple object, which before appeared only to spread forth its charm to delight the passing eye. As those whom Christ immediately addressed, had often seen "the flies of the field," and had yet to learn the sacred truth which the growth of the plant inculcated on them; so it is with us in regard to the course of the world in general. How many occasions are suffered to escape, without any exertion on our part to convert them to our spiritual edification. We find, indeed, in ourselves an anxiety to extract some temporal good out of every thing. We are not remiss in surveying events of the world in every possible light, so as to discern in what way they may add to our stock of worldly wisdom. But how little



is there of a corresponding zeal to press every thing into the service of the life eternal? A contented indifference—a “spirit of deep sleep,” as it is emphatically termed by the Prophet<sup>b</sup>—prevails among the disciples of a crucified Redeemer—among the very candidates for an immortality, purchased for them, as they confess, not without an infinite expense of labour and blood; and which has no connexion, therefore, they know, with inactivity and slumber. Strange inconsistency! *Christians* are the persons of whom we speak, as unwilling to take the trouble to collect for themselves that spiritual instruction, which, like the manna in the wilderness, is scattered for them on the face of the earth, demanding only to be gathered, to impart its sustenance to the soul. Though, indeed, there be “neither speech nor language” in the objects which the world presents for our instruction, yet (as one observes, who was no inattentive witness of the works of God

<sup>b</sup> Isaiah xxxix. 10. Rom. xi. 8.

in nature "their voices are heard : " "de-  
scribing the glory of God," and "shewing  
the beauty-wisdom." But the generality have  
no ear for such divine strains : and the hea-  
venly accents are lost amidst the overwhel-  
ming noise of striving for the flesh. As per-  
sons engaged in any particular contempla-  
tion, are shut in sounds which even forcibly  
strike in the ear : so whilst Divine wisdom  
is "strong within," and "uttering her  
voice in the streets," we hear not, because  
we are wholly given to thoughts of a dif-  
ferent kind. Our devotedness to the tem-  
poral purposes of the world excludes the  
consideration of its eternal use.

II. Further, that nothing might be want-  
ing to render the natural course of things  
an intelligible language to the humble  
Christian, the oracle of Scripture has been  
given to us, as the master-key by which  
the spiritual treasures of the world may  
be unlocked. By this holy oracle of God,  
we are directed, in what manner we should  
survey that course of things which is be-  
fore us. We have in it an authoritative

statement of the character and conduct of the Author of nature, by means of which we may more readily search him out in the circumstances of the world.—But, in order to convert the Scripture to this use, we must have read, and marked, and learned, and inwardly digested it. Its sacred instructions must have been “remembered upon our bed,” and “meditated in our waking.” We must have imbued ourselves with its spirit. For it is only by such an intimate acquaintance with Scripture, that we learn the style of the divine communications.—If, then, we find ourselves still insensible to the admonitions with which the circumstances of our life abound, let us examine, whether we have duly availed ourselves of those inspired guides, which God has graciously super-added, for the extension and elucidation of his law written on the world. And let us be impressed with the necessity of acquainting ourselves, more and more, with his holy word. Let us love that word with increasing affection ; and endeavour,

as it may be said, to saturate our hearts and minds with its saving truths.

III. But there is still an essential requisite, in order to a spiritual perception of the world—without which, mere intellectual sensibility to its instructions is vain, and the lamp of Scripture in vain enlightens our understanding:—namely, the right preparation of the heart. If the heart be not prostrated in affectionate devotion to the Cross of the Redeemer, all other pains are but vanity and vexation of spirit. A love of God, through Christ, must reign within us. This is the holy principle which must leaven all our thoughts and actions. This it is which will enable us to look at every thing around us with a religious eye. All our views of nature, without this, are only as altars piled with wood and offerings for sacrifice, but wanting the fire from heaven to kindle them into holy flames. He, however, who truly loves God from his heart, will pour out of the abundance of his heart on every thing which he be-

holds. He will see every thing in that point of view in which it glorifies God.

Cultivate, therefore, my Brethren, in yourselves this holy principle. Study the world in which you live with the eye of Christians. Let the spirit of your profession accompany you in your progress through the paths of life. Never cease to remember, that you stand in the midst of God's creation, as those on whom he has specially set his love. Sanctify yourselves, by devoutly looking to the Cross of your meritorious Redeemer; and so descend into that field of religious improvement, which the world presents to you. Let the mind of Jesus Christ be in you. Take him, as revealed to you in his Gospel, for your interpreter; and you, then, cannot fail to receive the instructions of the world in their true spiritual import.

Thus may you strengthen and improve your religious principles, even by those circumstances of the world, which appear to draw you away from Christ; and which, in

fact, do only instruct many in the ways of mammon, and not of God. By compelling every present object to pay a tribute, as it passes before your review, to your heavenly treasure, you weave the religion of the Gospel into the whole tissue of your lives ; you spiritualize even your most secular thoughts and actions.

How idle, then, is the complaint of those, who say, that their worldly occupations are of that urgent nature, as to leave them little leisure for the concerns of their religion. Those very occupations are the scene in which the principles of the Gospel are to be called into action. The devotion of the Christian is not one simple action, but many actions of various kinds, agreeing in this one point ;—the ascription of glory to God through Christ. “ He is the devout man, who lives no longer to his own will, or the way and spirit of the world, but to the sole will of God ; who considers God in every thing ; who serves God in every thing ; who makes all the parts of his common life, parts of piety,

by doing every thing in the name of God, and under such rules, as are conformable to his glory\*.”

Various, of course, will be the matter of devotion to different individuals, according to their various walks of life, and habits of mind. Those who are engaged in active employments, will illustrate the doctrines of their religion “in the chief place of concourse,”—“in the opening of the gates,”—amidst the manners and conversation of men. Those who live in the privacy of retirement, will search out the truth in the still contemplation of their own hearts. Those, again, to whom the scenes of rural nature are familiar, will discern the signs of “the wisdom which is from above,” in the fields,—amidst the labours of the husbandman. Whilst “they that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep”<sup>a</sup>.”

\* Law's Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life, chap. i.

<sup>a</sup> Psalm cvii. 23, 24.

## THE CHURCH'S CONVICTIONS

"Now come, therefore, my Brethren, be  
sensible to the manner and times of the  
work. There is nothing, and a man gets  
nothing, that is to be drawn from such a con-  
sideration, than that which our Lord has  
promised, not in the passage connected with  
the text—a promise, applicable to each  
particular instance of your religion, as well  
as to your reception of it as a whole—the  
promise of growth in grace. Consider,  
and by the secret agency of a Divine Pro-  
vidence, the plant daily grows and reaches  
as maturity. The care of God is, indeed,  
over it: he sustains it with the fatness of  
the earth, and waters it with the dew of  
heaven. But he answers to that care; it  
springs up with renovated life, and smiles  
in all its beauty on the hand which sup-  
ports and adorns it.—Has not he who  
"clothed the grass of the field, which to-  
day is, and to-morrow is cast into the  
oven," much more clothed you? Has he  
not given you the principles of immortal  
life in the Scriptures; and does he not  
provide sustenance for this life in that very  
world, in which he has placed you? And



Jer. viii. 20.

## SERMON XVIII.

## THE DAY OF THE LORD AT HAND.

LUKE xxi. 34, 35.

Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For, as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth.

THE immediate application of these words, is to the impending destruction of Jerusalem; that period of awful visitation from God, when,—the iniquity of the Chosen People being full, and the purposes of their separation from the rest of the world having been accomplished,—the Roman army was made the instrument of Almighty vengeance on that remnant of them, which had survived all former desolations. They were a merciful warning to the faithful, to

be prepared for the impending disaster; that they might have the power of escaping, when the horrors of that fearful day should be at hand; or that, in the event of their being involved in the *temporal* calamity, their *spiritual* safety, at least, might be assured to them.

But the text, like many other passages of Scripture in which prophetic declarations are contained, is not to be confined to this single sense. Whilst in its primary application, it refers to the temporal destruction of the City of Jerusalem;—in a secondary, and more noble sense, it refers to the future destruction of the world, and the final consummation of all things. The destruction, indeed, of Jerusalem, is emblematic of the latter event. It corresponds with the dissolution of the world in this respect; that it served to put a solemn close to the temporal part of the dispensation of Judaism; as the future catastrophe of the world will shut up, and finish, all that is temporal in the dispensation of Christianity. Hence, the language appropriate to the former event is applied

indiscriminately to the latter; and both are included in one burden of prophetic description. Hence, also, the lesson to be learned from the circumstances of the first destruction, is transferred, in its practical force, from the past event, to the future one which it foreshadows.

“Take heed,” therefore, “lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life; and so that day”—the awful day of the second advent of Christ to judge the world—should “come upon you unawares.”

The minister of the Gospel, who should exhort his hearers to live in expectation of the actual appearance of Christ to judge the world, may by some, perhaps, be considered as endeavouring to excite a groundless apprehension. It may be said; that, when we look both to the signs of the times, and the declarations of Scripture, it seems, rather, that much remains yet to be brought to light, of the counsel of God with regard to this visible world, before

the world shall be ripe for the second advent of Christ. Still, without presuming to fix the times and the seasons, which God has ordained for the development of his Providence, and has put in his own power; we may reasonably look forward to the day of Christ's second coming, as "*at hand*;" and take heed, lest that day come upon us unawares. For, it is enough, that *we know not* the day *when* he will come. "For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." Not to act upon the constant expectation of it, is inconsistent with our acknowledged ignorance; as it is to presume, that we have ascertained, that, at all events, it will not come within a certain period of time. The expectation which is safe and useful to us, is the expectation on which we must act. It was probable, that many of those whom our Lord addressed in the words of the text, would not live to witness the destruction of Jerusalem. Still he held it out to them as the wisdom of all, to take heed against the awful event. He proposed a general



from the expectation of his coming. For, to every practical purpose, the day of his visitation is to each of us, as if it were present, at the moment when our death shall close our temporal probation. There is but one night that intervenes to the individual Christian, between the sun which sets to him in this world, and that which will shed its beams on the glorified person of the Son of God coming with the hosts of heaven. His account is closed; such as he is, when he leaves the world, such will he be found in the day of judgment. The good or the evil that he has done, is registered in the sealed records of the divine memory; is placed beyond the power of man to add to it or take from it. The words of Jesus Christ, therefore, in the text, still apply to us in their practical force; though we may not suppose the final consummation of all things to be at hand. Not less dreadful will the event be to us, if death should surprise us amidst surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life; than the actual end of the world will be to those, who shall be living on the

earth at that time, in the like sinful courses. And, as our condition in the world is such, that no prudent person can reckon on a day beyond the present; we are bound to prepare for the coming of the Lord, as surely as if the morrow were the day of judgment.

Consider then the danger in which you are situated. Take heed against the coming of the Lord. Represent to yourselves, as forcibly as you can, the extreme perplexity of an unprepared soul, at the moment of its receiving its summons to depart from the world. Imagine, how insupportable must be the thought of being brought to a state of utter destitution, wherein is no hope of that saving mercy by which alone the lost soul can live. The sinless Redeemer himself may be contemplated for our instruction here, (as in every other point of his religion,) when, under the thrilling sorrow which pierced his heart, he cried out; "my God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me!" Learn, from this intense example, that inward desola-



tion under the like apprehension of the desertion of God, which the guilty soul must feel. Jesus Christ bore his unutterable anguish on the cross; because his heart was with God:—though God appeared for a while to have hidden his face, it was only for a little while; he returned again to the down-cast soul, and refreshed it with everlasting consolations. But how shall the soul laden with sins bear its own weight of sorrow? To that divine grace which alone could support it in such an extremity, it has done despite all the days of its life:—it has not been used to lift up itself to God:—how can it expect, that his comforts should refresh it in the midst of its distress!

Recollect further, that this is only the beginning of sorrows. Unless it should please God to accept a death-bed repentance, what mountains shall cover us, and what rocks shall hide us, from the out-pouring of the fury of his displeasure, when he comes to take vengeance on the sinner? And who shall be found so bold, as to *confide* in the acceptance of a death-

bed repentance, in the absence of all scriptural authority for such *confidence*? For look faithfully into the Scriptures, and you will find no *general rule* to that purport laid down there. The instance of the penitent malefactor on the cross, from which it is not unusual to hear men reasoning fallaciously to their own case, is only a splendid *exception* to the general order of Divine Providence, and not a sufficient ground of any *general principle* on the subject of a late repentance. From the expectation of punishment then, be assured, that the transition will be to punishment itself. But, "who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings?" The "worm that *never dieth*" and the "fire that *never is quenched*," are the lively images, by which Scripture presents to our minds that heart-withering grief, which the exile from God endures in a future state of reprobation. But they are only *images* of that torment.

\* Isaiah xxxiii. 14.

which they describe—imperfect substitutions for that which no human language or ideas can properly designate; for it must be *felt in itself*, in order to be conceived in itself. The state of reprobation is also very forcibly described in Scripture as the “second death<sup>a</sup>,”—a death, in reference to which, our mortal dissolution is only an introduction—a death of the soul as well as of the body—a death from which there is no awakening, as from the sleep of an earthly tomb—in which the whole spirit of the man is for ever bound fast to corruption; living without living,—dying without dying.

Think upon these things, and you will perceive the force of that striking admonition of our Lord; “Take heed to yourselves.” You will perceive in it the truth of that contrast which he has elsewhere drawn, between, the fear of God, and the fear of man. “I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that

<sup>a</sup> Rev. xx. 14. xxi. 8.

## THE DAY OF THE LORD AT HAND

HOW IS THERE THAT THEY CAN DO. But I will answer you whom ye shall fear; I am God, which after he hath killed, will power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, I am God.\*

There is the danger to which our condition is the more exposed. The inquiry next naturally arises. What are the means of securing ourselves against this danger? The answer is in some measure contained in the text where it tells us what are the things which will render the day of the Lord an unwelcome day to us. "Take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be surcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares." In general terms, we must be constantly watching against the seductive influence of the pleasures and occupations of this life. These are the temptations that induce a forgetfulness of that transitory situation in which we are placed, and will involve us

\* Luke xii. 4, 5.

in embarrassment and difficulty, when the day of the Lord shall appear. Either we are so addicted to the enjoyments attached to this temporary state of existence, or so engaged in its cares, that the provision due to the future world is altogether neglected; or at any rate, is only a subordinate object of our thoughts.

Now, it is to be observed, that the Gospel is neither adverse to a certain portion of worldly enjoyment, nor to a certain portion of worldly occupation. Its office is not to silence and suppress, but to regulate and sanctify, both our pleasures and our cares. Whilst it circumscribes our pleasures within the limits of innocence and moderation; it would convert our business on earth into the business of immortality. Our Lord accordingly speaks of our being *overcharged* with such things—of our being *weighed down* with them in such a way, that we must feel ourselves hampered and encumbered by them, when the emergency to which we shall be brought, will demand all

not arrive exertions to encounter it. The ~~choice~~ of the expressions employed by the Lord, particularly marks the application of his warning to *excesses*, both in *pleasure* and *business*, and not to the *use* of the things of the world: for he speaks of "sartienting and drunkenness, and cares," or rather anxieties, "of this world." And he does not caution us against being *simply occupied* in the things of the world, but against being "*overcharged*," or *engaged down* by them. It is a *weakness* *strongly* therefore, against which he *has* his voice: whether that spirit be *absorbed* in mere enjoyment of the *possessions* of our condition, or in *active* *occupation* in them.

If therefore you would be duly prepared for the day of the Lord's visitation: overcome by incessant watchfulness the *overbearing* pressure of a worldly spirit. It matters not how *actively*, or how *joyously*, you pass through the scenes of the world, provided you are not confirmed to the *world* by your intercourse with it. Believing

however that the Lord is at hand, see that  
 "your moderation be known to all men." It is the worldly spirit which clogs the soul, and disables it for flight, when the day of the Lord may come upon us. This is the weight that must be laid aside, in order that we may rise and depart at a moment's warning. For how can the heart which mammon has occupied, be open to those influences of the Holy Spirit, whereby alone it can be "swept and garnished" for the reception of the Saviour? How shall the body that is bowed down with the gatherings of the world, be alert, when the call shall be sounded forth;—"escape for thy life, look not behind thee, lest thou be consumed." The call is in vain to such an one: like Lazarus called from the dead, he is bound hand and foot with grave-clothes, and needs one to loose him, that he may go forth to life and liberty.—How again can the lovers of pleasure be awake, without a lively attention, to the sound of the

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THEY are dissolved  
 I see, when a work of mercy must  
 be done. They are slumbering  
 in complacency, when all the faculties  
 of the soul are summoned into action.  
 "The little sheep, a little shepherd, a  
 little shepherd of the little sheep;" cries  
 the voice of ALMIGHTY INTELLIGENCE:— whilst  
 on the other hand the voice of the Judge  
 at all their sins is heard on the ear:  
 "Woe be unto thee, O sleeper: arise,  
 and meet thy God, if so be that God will  
 deliver thee, that thou perish not!"  
 Surely the day of the Lord will come  
 upon such, as it did on the inhabitants  
 of Nineveh:—"for while they be folden to-  
 gether as calves, and while they are drunken  
 as oxen, they shall be devoured as  
 calves and oxen."

ALMIGHTY consider, therefore, with your-  
 selves, my Brethren, with what spirit you  
 are pursuing both your occupations and

<sup>1</sup> Prov. vi. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Jonah i. 8.

Nahum i. 10.



your pleasures in the world. See whether you are in danger of being surprised by the coming of the day of the Lord. Be assured that his visitation will be a sudden one. It is said, that it shall come "as a snare,"—"as a thief in the night"<sup>k</sup>. We are commanded to "watch, for we know not what hour our Lord doth come<sup>l</sup>." "In such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh<sup>m</sup>." "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all children of light and the children of the day: we are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore, let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breast-plate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation<sup>n</sup>." Sudden then as the day of the Lord may be, in fact;

<sup>k</sup> 1 Thess. v. 2.

<sup>l</sup> Matt. xxiv. 42.

<sup>m</sup> Matt. xxiv. 44.

<sup>n</sup> 1 Thess. v. 4—8.

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you may prevent the coming of that day suddenly upon you. For this depends entirely on your own state of preparation. The question for you to determine is, whether you are believing in the word of your Lord, and anticipating the suddenness of his coming, by measures which imply an entire trust in him. Only believe in him and you are safe. Perilous as your condition in the world is:—full of anxious apprehensions, as you must be, when you reflect—that you know not what a day may bring forth,—that, whilst you are to-day among them that “marry and are given in marriage,” or among them that “buy and sell and get gain,”—to-morrow may number you among those that are gone to their account:—still, nothing can harm you,—nothing can disquiet you,—if your refuge is under the shadow of the wings of your Redeemer. Look indeed, with feelings of awe, to that visitation of the Lord, which, whenever it shall come, will be unutterably appalling to frail mortality. But, having faith in that great Atonement,—which, at his first coming, he

graciously wrought for the sins of the world,—know, that you have a confidence, stronger than the barrier of the rocks, safer than the shelter of the mountains,—a Zoar, to which you may escape, and where you may be at rest for ever, “from the windy storm and tempest.” Having faith, you do not simply look for the Lord, as one who is *expected*: but you have received him already into your hearts. Does he call you into his more immediate presence?—You are ready;—whether you are engaged in active business, as Matthew at the receipt of custom:—or are among those who go out to their daily labour for their bread; as Peter, and Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee, were called amidst the toils of the fishing-boat: your loins are girded: you look not back: you forsake all, and follow at the beckoning of your Lord.

## SERMON XIX.

WATCHING AND PRAYER THE CHRISTIAN  
SECURITIES.

LUKE xxi. 36.

Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.

CHRIST told his disciples on the eve of his departure from them—"I will not leave you comfortless"—"I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter."—He no sooner communicated the distressing intelligence of his approaching departure; than he refreshed their drooping spirits with the promise of one who should compensate for his absence. So again, having taught them to expect tribulation in the world, he counteracts the disheartening effect of such an expectation by a word of

comfort ;—" be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world." And so it is throughout with that Gospel which he proclaimed. It inflicts no hurt on the spirit of man, without " pouring in oil and wine " into the wound. Does it tell us, that we are corrupt, and have no power of ourselves to help ourselves ? It tells us, also, of a Redemption whereby that corruption is overpowered ; of the grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby our infirmities are strengthened and helped. Does it endeavour to produce in us a disrelish for the present world ?—it sets off against its gloomy pictures of this life, the glorious opening of an eternal day in a future state of perfect blessedness. Or does it stir up the slumbering conscience with the terrors of the Lord—forewarning us of that day of wrath, when the Son of man shall again appear to judge the world ?—it leaves us not without a consolatory admonition ; providing those who will attend to it with the means of escape. The passage of Scripture before us, strikingly illustrates this soothing tendency of the Gospel. It is the conclusion

of that mixed prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the end of the world, which chiefly occupies this chapter of Saint Luke. Enough had been disclosed of the dispensations of God, with regard to these great events, to scare the heart of the firmest believer. But to excite a vague sensation of alarm was not the purport of these fearful tidings: as appears from those precepts of caution with which they are closed. The disciples of Christ are first exhorted to "take heed," lest the day of the Lord should "come upon them unawares;" and then, to assist them in taking heed effectually, the means of so doing are expressly pointed out:—"Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

The two securities against the evil of the day of the Lord, here declared, are watching, and incessant prayer. Let us consider the support and comfort derived from them to the Christian, under that

anxious uncertainty with respect to his approaching doom, to which he is subjected so long as he lives in the world.

1. We are instructed to *watch*. The Christian in the world is like a sentinel at his post. Spiritual sleep is spiritual death to him. The uncertainty of the hour at which his present position in the world may be attacked, denies him a moment of spiritual sleep. For, the very moment in which he fancies himself secure, may be the one of attack; and all his past vigilance would then be rendered fruitless by that single act of remissness.

But what is the nature of that "watching" so strictly required of the Christian? when may he be said to be continually awake to the coming of his Lord?

"Watching," then, I observe, in the Christian sense of the term, is the alertness of a mind, which never forgets, in its intercourse with the world, what Jesus Christ has done in behalf of sinful man. It is the habitual recollection of the great mercy dispensed to us in his atoning blood;

that keeps us as wakeful sentinels at our post, and prevents the disaster of a surprise. Let me shew this more distinctly.

1. He, who never forgets in his intercourse with the world, the love of Jesus Christ towards him, is one who "walks by faith, not by sight." He is directed on his way through life, as "seeing him who is invisible." We must feel that we have an interest in the invisible world, in order to be weaned from an undue interest in visible things. For visible things are present to us, and force themselves on our notice. We live amongst them. They constitute the household of our daily life. They possess, therefore, in this respect, a decisive advantage over our spiritual concerns, which are not subjected to our senses, and whose enjoyment is rested in promise and expectation. But the faith which is firmly established on Christ,—being "the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen,"—restores the balance. It enables us to detract from that delusive importance,

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. v. 7.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. xi. 27.

<sup>c</sup> Heb. xi. 1.



which the things of the world possess, from their being sensible to us, and surrounding us. By an habitual recollection of him who undertook the restoration of our spiritual life, we are kept constantly in mind, that there are other cares worthy of our zeal, besides those which are employed about worldly objects; and are effectually put on our guard against the engrossing tendency of the latter: and thus we may be said to *watch*, amidst our active occupations in the world.

2. Again, he who habitually recollects the Atonement made for sin, will watch against that sinfulness of his own nature, and of the world around him, which called for the precious sacrifice of the Redeemer. A recollection of the Atonement is a recollection of the guilt and danger of sin. Can you pass through things temporal, as if there were no danger in them; when you think that Jesus Christ died to deliver you from their evil effects on your character and your happiness? Can you indulge the lusts of the flesh, as if there were no danger in them;

when you think that Jesus Christ died, to counteract their tendency to alienate you from God? The true disciples of Christ know, that death is in every thing around them; and that it is their part, as heirs of immortality, to shun the mortal contagion of worldly things. As such, therefore, you will observe, with a jealous eye, the course of those circumstances, in which the Providence of God has placed you. You will be anxious to detect their effect on your hearts;—to see, whether they take up too large a portion of your affection; whether they conform you to them; whether they mortify the vital principle of the religion of the Gospel within you. Thus, also, you may be truly said to *watch* against the day of the Lord.

3. Further, he who is deeply impressed with a conviction, that Jesus Christ came into the world to take away sin, will also habitually expect him, as surely about to come again, to vindicate, with power, his despised goodness and long-suffering. Estimating the exceeding sinfulness of sin, by the costliness of the sacrifice made to

atone for it, he will dread its punishment. He will be assured, that so awful an expiation cannot have been undertaken, without the ultimate consequence, that the righteousness of God shall be made hereafter to appear with perfect clearness by the visitation of sin—by its perpetual exile from the kingdom of God :—when “ the Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity ; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire : there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.” The Christian’s belief in the Atonement of his Saviour, will thus necessarily keep him looking for the day of judgment. The more steadily and vividly he beholds the footsteps of the Redeemer already impressed on the world, the more eagerly will he look forward to that second coming, which shall be, not with the blood of Atonement, but with the rod of iron to bruise the incorrigible transgressor. The intensity of his faith in the past trans-

\* Matt. xiii. 41, 42.

actions of the Gospel, will keep him strictly watching for the fulfilment of what yet remains undeveloped of it.

II. The other security here proposed to the Christian against the danger of a sudden visitation from the Lord, is,—incessant prayer. “Pray always;” adds our Saviour: omit no occasion of holding communion with God, and of acquainting yourselves with him: “be instant in season and out of season.” Prayer indeed is the peculiar attribute of the Christian life—the food by which the Christian soul is nourished and strengthened. But its importance as a security to the soul against the danger of its situation in the world, is, that which the passage now before us particularly presses upon our attention.

“When I am weak, then am I strong;” observes the Apostle\*. This form of expression aptly describes the power of prayer. We cannot but be conscious of our own insufficiency, to meet those circumstances of difficulty, which are presented

\* 2 Cor. xii. 10.

to us in the world. Our hearts speak to the fact of our natural weakness. Experience of the world evidences it to us. Prayer then, here, admirably succours us in this situation of trial. It enables us at once, to give vent to that sentiment of helplessness, with which our heart is full; and to feel at ease, by inspiring a confidence in the help of him, to whom we pray. So that it both relieves the heart, and confers on it an exquisite delight. For whilst helplessness is painful, a dependence on One, whose benevolence is unfailing, and whose power is strong, is delightful. Thus by prayer, the weak is made strong. The praying Christian is no longer the poor helpless creature, vainly struggling with the difficulties of his earthly condition; but he becomes the "confiding dependant on Almighty succour. — "The Lord is my shepherd;" he may boldly say; "I shall not want: yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they com-

fort me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.

But whence is it, that prayer has this strengthening efficacy?

I. I answer, first, it is of God's promise. In commanding us to pray, he has at the same time intimated to us, that our prayer shall not be in vain.—“All things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” In a parable, relating to us the success of a *repeated* application to an unjust judge, where redress had been at first implored in vain, we are instructed, that we must not faint in our supplications; but that if we importunately seek of God in prayer, the things whereof we have need, he will at length give ear to our addresses. He is willing, indeed, to be expressly announced to us, in words dictated by his Spirit, as the hearer of

<sup>a</sup> Psalm xxiii. 1. 4. 6.      <sup>b</sup> Matt. xxi. 22.

<sup>c</sup> James v. 16, &c.

prayer. "O thou that hearest prayer," says David by the Spirit, "unto thee shall all flesh come!" The efficacy of prayer, therefore, as the strengthening of the soul, rests immediately on the force of the Divine promise. We are assured, that they who pray faithfully shall be heard. Whether it pleases God, or not, to grant the particular request that we may prefer before him:—for this will depend on his knowledge of what is really expedient for us:—this we know, at any rate, from his word,—that *he will hear* us:—good will result to us from our prayer—and our labour of love will not be in vain.

And here we might well be content to leave the question concerning the efficacy of prayer. A clear divine promise is more to the humble Christian, than ten thousand reasons, as a ground of satisfaction to his heart. But, because the subject has been involved in perplexity by the cavils of proud reasoners, and it has been idly asked, how God can bend to the prayers

<sup>1</sup> Psalm lxx. 2.

of his creatures, consistently with his own immutable nature; it is important to point out to you, that the doctrine of the efficacy of prayer still remains of practical obligation on us, notwithstanding such cavils,—that there are sound reasons why we should pray, independently of any objection drawn from the notion of God's immutability.

We frankly acknowledge then, that there is a difficulty on the subject of prayer, when we attempt to look beyond ourselves, and assume the Divine attributes as the basis of our reasoning. But if we commence with ourselves, considering what is needful for us, as the creatures of God in the world; there is no difficulty in accounting for the appointment of prayer, as a means of obtaining the blessing of God.

1. Consider its importance in elevating the soul of man into communion with God. To be obliged to pray to God for every thing needful for us, is, to be obliged to cultivate an acquaintance with him who is our life and our happiness.



Who, then, can justly question the importance of prayer? For, whilst the Christian is praying, that blessed Person of the Holy Trinity,—to whose immediate care the souls of the redeemed are committed, now that the great High Priest himself is passed into the heavens;—comes down and visits him. Even whilst he prays for the Spirit, the Spirit anticipates the holy request, and is present with the suppliant for his aid.—Happy, then, is it for us, that we are required to importune the blessing of God, in order to our receiving it. We are, at the same time, both blessed in the acceptance of our prayer, and improved in our religion. The design of the Gospel, as a revelation given to bring us near to God, is promoted by the act itself of prayer.

2. Another advantage derived to the Christian from the appointment of prayer, is a conviction of its being incumbent on him to contribute some exertion, on his part, even in obtaining blessings, which he confesses to be the *gift* of God. If he could receive blessings at the hand of God,

comes in the name of Providence, like the name that is in the inter-  
vention of the united heart and beated  
heart. Now we are not sufficient, compen-  
sated, would not have that general ex-  
pression in prayer, which the Gospel  
contains in it. But now that we are  
supposed to be in prayer, and thus  
to be in prayer from the Giver of  
all good things, how surely are we  
sure, that if we would obtain the pro-  
mise of Christianity, we must do the  
works of Christianity! For there cannot  
be a stronger instance to this effect, than  
is the use of prayer. By prayer, we both  
show, that all we have is of God; and  
yet, that we are not excused from exertion;  
with reference to those very blessings which  
we desire of him. If in prayer, then, we  
show this: how much more must we  
show the necessity, in our general con-  
duct as Christians, of *working out our  
salvation*, even whilst we ascribe the sal-  
vation itself, which we attain, to the sole  
good pleasure of God.

3. Again, by being obliged to have

to prayer as a means of obtaining the blessing of God, the Christian soul is habituated to that feeling of humble dependence on God, which is the very spirit of the religion of Christ. Whilst we enjoy the divine blessings, we are too apt to forget—as the Israelites did at the very moment while “the meat,” with which they were miraculously fed, “was in their mouths,”—the hand which benefits us. How needful is it, then, that some act of habitual performance should be enjoined on us, by which this forgetfulness of God should be incessantly counteracted. Prayer is precisely such an act. It perpetually reclains the wandering soul, and prostrates it before the mercy-seat of God. Without prayer, it does not seem that even our faith in the Atonement could long be maintained. For this faith presupposes a heart bowed down with the consciousness of its own demerit, and casting itself unreservedly on the mercy of God. But this bowing down of the heart—this cast-

ing of itself on the mercy of God—is not its natural posture. It relapses to its own self-sufficiency, unless it be disciplined to submission. Incessant prayer supplies a course of habits, by which this necessary discipline is obtained.

From these considerations (and many more might be added to the same purpose), does it not sufficiently appear, that it is good for us to pray—that God has wisely appointed that we should regard him as the hearer of prayer? Therefore, my Brethren, “cast not off fear, nor restrain prayer before God<sup>k</sup>:”—“in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God<sup>l</sup>.” Whatever of mystery there is in the subject, be not too curious to explain. Be satisfied that God is without variableness, and yet will stoop to hear your petitions. Assert the perfection of his nature in every respect, as strongly as those who would deny you the

<sup>k</sup> Job xv. 4.

<sup>l</sup> Phil. iv. 6.

comfort of prayer; but, at the same time, hold with equal firmness of assurance the importance of prayer, as a duty bound upon man. "Pray always," as you hope "to escape" the dangers of your situation in the world, and to "stand before the Son of man."

And it is important to mark, that the two methods of guarding against a surprise in the coming of the day of the Lord, are required to be used *together*. "Watch ye therefore, and pray always," are the words of Christ closely uniting the two. So, also, Saint Peter says, "Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer<sup>m</sup>." And so in our Saviour's affecting exhortation to his disciples, during the scene of his vehement intercession with the Father, before his crucifixion; "watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation<sup>n</sup>." It is not enough, that we bear a lively

<sup>m</sup> 1 Peter iv. 7. The word here used by Saint Peter, expresses that vigilance which is the opposite to the stupor of drunkenness.

<sup>n</sup> Matt. xxvi. 41.

remembrance of the love of Christ towards us in all our intercourse with the world; but we must continually be *pleading* with the Father our interest in the Atonement of his Son. We must not only *feel* that we owe ourselves to Christ: but we must *rest* by our hearts in the strength of the Redemption: importuning God, by what he has already done for us in giving us his Son, to give us all things whereof we have need both for life and godliness. Prayer is dead: unless it be the prayer of the watchful soul,—unless it be the dictate of an *intrinsic* dependence on the Redeemer. *Watching* against the temptations of the world by faith in Christ, is a vain waking of the soul: unless it be a vigil of the Lord that we keep: exercising our hearts and tongues in communion with him. In fact, a thankful remembrance of the death and sacrifice of Christ, and communion with God in prayer, are inseparable parts of the Christian life. And therefore, each must be so exemplified in us, that it may draw after it the other. Whenever we pray to God, it must be *Christian* prayer that

ascends—it must be the incense of the Atonement rising from the heart. The “golden vials full of odours” which are described in the apocalyptic vision, are “the prayers of *saints*”—the prayers of those who have been sanctified as children of God in Christ. A heathen may pray to God as the creature of natural Providence. A Christian must pray to God *as* a Christian; as one who knows that he is God’s by a second creation; as one who acknowledges God as the Head of the kingdom of grace.

“Watch ye, therefore, and pray always,” my Brethren, “that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.” God will mercifully look upon you with his favour, if you be found among those who are thus waiting for your Lord; and will finally admit you to that place prepared for the redeemed, where

your happiness shall be endangered no more. You will thus "be accounted worthy," says the text. This does not mean, that our watching and prayers will after all, be of any meritorious effect; for we can never *earn* our salvation: though the eye of faith never slumbered; and though our prayers sent up their unintermitted sweet incense to the throne of grace; we can never appear *worthy* in the sight of God. But we may be *privileged* by his grace, to inherit a recompense, which we cannot ever *deserve*. And this is the force of the passage before us. "Watch and pray always," in order that ye may be *privileged* "to escape," and "to stand before the Son of man." As the prayers and the alms of the unconverted Cornelius came up for a memorial before God, and obtained for him a special call to the knowledge of the Gospel; so will your faithful watching, and your unwearied prayer, come up before him, and cause you to be remembered by him in the great day of judgment. In that day he will look





## SERMON XX.

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### THE LIFE IN THE FLESH MADE THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT.

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PHIL. i. 21—24.

For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But  
if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour:  
yet what I shall choose, I wot not: for I am in a  
strait betwixt two: having a desire to depart and  
to be with Christ; which is far better: neverthe-  
less, to abide in the flesh is more needful for  
you.

In no respect is the Christian victory over  
the world more apparent, than in its mas-  
tery over that feeling, which is certainly  
among the strongest principles of our  
nature;—the love of the present life.  
Nature leads us to regard this life as a  
good in itself. We are disposed to sacri-  
fice every thing else to the preservation of  
ourselves in this present state of existence;

and, without taking into our estimate the future consequences of death, we shrink with instinctive horror from the event itself, as the termination of our connexion with the objects that surround us. Now, Christianity does not contradict this dictate of our nature: but it effectually holds it in check. Revealing to us the fact, that we have an interest beyond the grave, it enables us to see, that, if we would act consistently with the feeling of nature prompting us to desire life, we must include in our view, a regard to that life which is to come; and so seek to live *now*, that we may continue to live *after death*.

Next to the Saviour himself, no professor of Christianity has more fully exemplified the victory of faith in this respect, than the holy Apostle Paul. His whole conduct, proved him to have adopted that enlarged notion of the desirableness of life, which belongs to a believer in the Christian Resurrection. He valued not the present life, simply, according to the suggestion of unenlightened reason; but as it was useful for maturing the fruit of his

labour in the Gospel. He contemplated with joy, the glory which awaited him with his Redeemer, after death; and could look forward, therefore, to the close of the present stage of existence, without the alarm incidental to the mere child of nature.

This truly Christian spirit, which we know from his history to have been habitually displayed in his conduct, he has sketched for us in the animated and pathetic passage of the text. The Philippian church, to which he is addressing himself, was suffering under persecution at the time when this Epistle was written; and the Apostle himself, then in prison at Rome for the sake of the Gospel, is consoling his converts, by demonstration of his interest in their behalf, and that resignation to Christ which had animated his exertions:—at once encouraging them by his example, and pointing out to them the real character of a Christian profession. He tells them therefore, of the patience in which he possessed his soul; that his life in the world was only labour to him; whilst

his death would be a gainful release from that labour, as he should then be with him, for whom alone he lived:—still, that his desire of being useful to them personally, prevailed over his anxiety to depart and be with Christ. “For to me,” says he, “to live is Christ;”—‘I have no further object in living, but to promote the kingdom of Christ on earth. I am dead to the world, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ:’—“and to die,” he continues, “is gain;”—‘my death will be a happy release to me from a life of anxiety and toil, to peace with God.’ “But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour;”—‘by remaining in the world, I shall proceed with the work of an evangelist, and promote the spread of the Gospel.’ “Yet what I shall choose, I wot not: for I am in a strait betwixt two: having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better: nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you;”—‘I am both, so assured of the happiness reserved for me after death, and so desirous of continuing those exertions, which are

...in the support of my sons in  
the temple. Thus I am perplexed in my  
choice. Although I desire not this mortal  
life in its own state. I still desire it, as  
it may be made useful to the extension of  
the kingdom of Christ.

The apostle's example of Christian  
courage over the world, in a point where  
nature asserts itself so strongly, as in  
the question of life and death, may seem,  
in the first view, an evidence of the  
superiority of Christianity, rather  
than of the ordinary professor in peaceful  
times of the Church. But this is not the  
case. Though indeed, when we connect  
the expressions of the text with what we  
know of Saint Paul from other passages  
of Scripture, we discern in them the re-  
signed and inflexible spirit, which neither  
tribulation, nor distress, nor persecution,  
nor famine, nor nakedness, nor peril, nor  
sword, could separate from the love of  
God in Christ Jesus; still, the expressions  
themselves import nothing more, than what  
ought to be the feeling of every disciple  
of Christ. For, wherein does the Christian

differ from him who knows not Christ but in this ;—that he is become a “ new creature ;” no longer living after the will of the flesh, or after the will of man, but after the will of God,—choosing the things which are invisible and immortal before those which are visible and mortal ? He is not worthy of the title which he bears, if he admits the world into competition with the interest which his faith presents to his pursuit. Christianity is in fact a discipline, by which we die daily to the world, and live more and more vigorously to the Spirit dwelling in our hearts. So that he who cannot truly say, at least thus far with the Apostle, that “ to me to live is Christ and to die is gain ;” has not duly considered, “ what manner of spirit he is of,” as a professor of the Gospel : he may have received the Gospel as it enlightens the understanding ; but he has not received it in its transforming power into his heart. To attain, indeed, to that glorious confession of the Apostle contained in the subsequent account of himself, as only anxious to live for the sake of the Gospel,

and "in a strait betwixt two," whether to wish more for his death, or for his continuance in a life of laborious exertion—is, it must be owned, the work of an advanced Christian; of him who is grown strong in the Lord. But even this height of Christian perfection belongs not to the martyr only. It is what every disciple must study to attain. God may not have endued you with the spirit of a Paul—with that intrepid constancy which resists unto blood:—but he promises grace to all who take Christ as their life; and he will not fail to carry those who labour after perfection to a strength beyond their natural power of attainment.

We may consider, therefore, these words of the Apostle, as a general outline of those feelings, with which it behoves Christians to contemplate both life and death:—as an instruction to all; neither to love the present mortal life in such a way, as to lose sight of the glory of immortality; nor so to look forward to the glory which shall be revealed to the faithful



after death, as to lose sight of the importance of their station in the present world :—so that, whether they live, they may “ live unto the Lord ;” or whether they die, they may “ die unto the Lord ;” and that the life of the spirit may throughout prevail over the life of the flesh.

I. First, then, as Christians, impress on your whole conduct the sentiment, that, whilst “ to live is Christ, to die is gain.” Be willing to resign your life, however important and precious it may appear to you, into the hands of God, whenever it may please him to call on you to relinquish it. Be assured, that, since Christ has submitted to taste of death for every man, death is disarmed of its sting ; and no time of departure, therefore, can be premature to the Christian. Now that the work of restoration has been accomplished by his Saviour ; and his dead body will surely be raised up in the latter day ; death must be gain to him, if he be only “ found in Christ,” when it shall visit him. Nay, the very circumstance of regarding

the close of our life on earth with this feeling of devout resignation, is included in the act of living to Christ, and gives us the cheering hope, that we shall "be found in him," at the moment of our departure.

But is this the feeling with which death is commonly regarded amongst us? Are we disposed to consider it, as a casting away of the impediments which obstruct our entrance on the life immortal with Christ? Do we not, on the contrary, find the reverse of the sentiment of Saint Paul currently adopted?—namely, that to die is *not* gain:—when we observe, for instance, all the art and care of men directed to the preservation of their life in the flesh; and their spiritual life suffered to languish and consume away; as if a death of the latter were no evil to the nature of man—no object of antipathy to the Christian soul. Death seems to be dreaded by some professors of the doctrine of immortality, as if it terminated at once their existence and their happiness. The thought of it strikes a horror on their

spirits, and it no sooner suggests itself, than they dismiss it. Or, if it is allowed, that "to die is gain," this is applied rather to those whose life is embittered with sorrow—who feel existence in this world a burden to them—and to whom death comes as a reprieve from suffering. Or, again, if the declaration of the Apostle is understood in its right scriptural sense, it is often limited to those, who have passed through the general term of years allotted to man—with whom the day of worldly enjoyment is gone by,—and who may, therefore, so resign themselves to Christ, as to look upon their death as gain.

The ground of this mistaken estimate of the present life is to be found in the melancholy truth; that, with Christians at large—with those to whom the Author of eternal life is the alpha and omega of their profession—"to live is *not* Christ." Thence it is, that to die is not gain. If life were valued as an important opportunity for acquainting ourselves with God through the revelation of his only-begotten

Son, we should then look forward to the termination of it, as the commencement of our fruition of that Godhead, which we have previously known by faith. If, to live were Christ, the goods of this life, which interest us so strongly in it, would assume their proper place in our estimation. Our chief anxiety would be employed about that to which it is due. We should seek *first* the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We should be principally engaged in laying up treasures in heaven. Death would then seem only a natural transition to us, from imperfect means of doing the work of immortality, to an enlarged capacity of spiritual perception and action—to entire freedom from those restraints, which our present condition in the flesh opposes to the success of our exertions. The time would be hailed with devout joy, when Christ should be all in all to us.

I would not be understood, at the same time, to assert, that death is divested of all its awe, even to him whose life is thus given to Christ. For the Gospel, as I have before observed, does not aim to stifle the voice

of nature. Nature will still be heard, disclaiming the silence and gloom of the tomb, and deprecating the stroke which mingles the body with the dust. The Apostle himself, in the passage of the text, does not appear to covet death as that which was *naturally* desirable to him; but only in reference to the peace which it would bring to him as a disciple of Christ. In like manner, we read and hear of eminent Christians, who, though rejoiced at the prospect of receiving their reward, have yet prayed that the death, which they owed their Lord, might not be terrible. So also our Church admirably expresses the feeling of nature under the control of a Christian spirit; when she suggests to us to pray against "sudden death," and for help "in the hour of death;" and in the burial of the dead more pointedly in the petition;—"suffer us not, at our last hour, *for any pains of death* to fall from thee." But the awe with which death is *naturally* regarded, is useful to the believer; as giving scope to the exercise of those truly Christian graces—

patience and resignation, and humility; rendering the joy, which he may feel in going into the presence of his Saviour, a rejoicing tempered with fear:—a state of feeling, at once accordant with the spirituality of our faith, and with the frailty of our present condition.

-- II. We observe in the next place, that we are instructed by the text, not to look forward to the life immortal in such a way, as to lose sight of the importance of the present life. The spirit of Christianity is not one of indifference to this present scene of things. The immortality which it promises after death, is not to be simply regarded as a state *subsequent* to the present, but as the proper *consequence* of it,—as that which by Divine appointment flows out of, and is dependent on, the present stage of being. It follows as a *reward* of present exertion; and presupposes therefore, a manifestation of our character during this previous state,—an obedience on our part, to certain laws prescribed by our Divine Governor

for the regulation of our conduct. Superstition, or fanaticism, or false philosophy, may separate the perfect state of man in a future world, from his imperfect state in this. But the Gospel does not require or sanction an exclusive surrender of ourselves to the hope of immortality, so as to despise the joys and sorrows of the world through which we are passing. It requires us rather to be anxious to continue in this life, with a view to our active usefulness, as the servants of Christ, to ourselves, and to those with whom Providence has especially connected us. For so Saint Paul speaks of himself, as wishing to live in the flesh, for the sake of Christ, and for the fruit of his labour:—insomuch, that, though the happiness after death was in itself his real good, he was divided in his choice between that, and a life devoted to the labours of the Gospel.

But how common is it to hear extreme statements of the case on this point; disparaging that natural and sober character, which distinguishes our religion!

The irreligious and the sensualist, it is thought, may take an active interest in this present life; because it is their all: these may reasonably deprecate death; because, whilst it closes their earthly enjoyment, it is attended with no hope of a blessed resurrection. But the Christian on the other hand, as having his chief interest in the future world, ought, therefore, it is sometimes concluded, to wean himself *entirely* from present objects, and to look forward with eagerness to death as his entrance on immortality.

There is, however, a very great difference between the love of life, merely as it is the life in the flesh, and the love of it, as it is the life of the spirit;—and between the fear of death, as it is the end of our career of enjoyment, and the fear of it, as it is the end of our connexion with a scene of things, in which we are actively exerting the principles of the Gospel. Thus, even the spiritual Paul could love life, when he viewed it spiritually: even his fearless soul might be said to have feared death, when he contemplated in it his removal from



that sphere of exertion, in which his heart was deeply interested. This his feeling with regard to life and death, he has not only expressed in the text, but in other passages of Scripture,—in particular, where he says in his affecting farewell to the elders of Ephesus: “ But none of these things, (no bonds nor afflictions) move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself; *so that* I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God <sup>a</sup>.

Whilst, moreover, the proper interest of the Christian is rightly placed in the future invisible world:—this ought not to have the effect of destroying his interest in the present world; but should simply qualify and moderate the latter. It is a blind zeal for Christian perfection, which overlooks the humble concerns of the present inferior state. For it is a zeal, which, if consistent with itself, would call us away from action altogether, and take

<sup>a</sup> Acts xx. 24.

there is the power of living and improving and this is the immortality purchased for us by Christ.

Remember, my Brethren, you think with us, "Is it not said that to live is Christ?" you think upon the end of your life, as the close of your period of probation and deliverance without a feeling of anxiety; and yet you are not before you have finished your course, and you can say with the confidence, that "to depart is no matter." Surely, "to depart" is far better,—but can you reasonably trust at any particular moment of your life, that to depart is far better *for you*. If your soul should be required of you this night; could you feel satisfied, that you had done your utmost in order to your obtaining the mercy of redemption through the merits of Christ?—could you say, think you, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus?" Must not even the most mature Christian, when he reflects on his former self, crave to be spared a little, before he shall "go hence and be no more seen;" that he may add repentance to repentance,—faith to

faith,—holiness to holiness? For, is there any one scarcely that can say; ‘he has now nothing more to do in this world, but to die?’ I speak not of the Christian already at the very crisis of his departure. Then, by the grace of the Holy Spirit helping him in his greatest need, he may happily be brought to feel, that he has only to cast himself on the mercy of his Redeemer, and die. It is of the merciful provision of God, that the love of life should become feeble in the bosom of his faithful servant; when it has fully served its purpose, and would only discompose the departing soul. This has been evidenced to us, in the last moments of many of our brethren who have died in the Lord. Resigned to the will of God, they have been conscious that their days of pilgrimage in the world were spent; and, in the strengthening hope of divine mercy, have departed in peace, without regret that the time of departure was come. Such is the support which I believe to be vouchsafed to every true Christian in his dying hour. But so long as there is hope of

life, so long must the Christian wish for space for working out his salvation;—so long must he value life, as a privilege which it would be profane either to abuse or despise;—so long must he feel the force of those endearments to the work of the Gospel, which the circumstances of his condition in the world have occasioned; and *therefore* wish to live<sup>b</sup>.

But there are some strong expressions of our Saviour, which might seem to favour a contempt of the present life. Saint John reports him saying; “He that loveth his life shall lose it: and he that hateth his life in this world, shall keep it unto life eternal.” And Saint Luke; “If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple<sup>c</sup>.” What, then, is the force of these expressions? Do they amount to an injunction, that life must be renounced by the Christian, with all its

<sup>b</sup> See Izaak Walton’s account of the last moments of Hooker.

<sup>c</sup> John xii. 25.

<sup>d</sup> Luke xiv. 26.

endearments? Certainly not. They are idioms of the language in which our Saviour spoke, pointing out to his hearers, to whom such a style of expression was familiar, the necessity of embracing his religion with an ardent affection; as that with which no earthly ties whatever could be admitted into competition. They are intended, both, to convey a strong idea of that sort of interest with which the Gospel should be pursued, and to shew, where the preference was due, when the claims of the Gospel and of the world were opposed to each other. We love our life—we love our kindred :—so must we love the Gospel, and still more :—we are reluctant to part with life,—to part with those who are dear to us ;—but we must overcome this reluctance, when it may so happen, that our duty to the Gospel requires us to forsake all, and follow it. We are not called upon *positively* to reject the life in the flesh, but only to hold it in subordination to the life of the spirit. So that our Lord here seconds, rather than opposes, that estimation of the present life which I

have been here recommending to you. He would have it so loved, that our life, as the subjects of his spiritual kingdom, may prevail throughout it.

Upon the whole, then, the Christian neither undervalues the present life, nor yet regards it as its chief interest. Like the Apostle himself, whose words we have been considering, he is "in a strait betwixt two." He must both love his present life, and yet not love it. He must love it first and chiefly; when he looks at it as a precious opportunity for working out his salvation, and of contributing his endeavours to the promotion of the kingdom of Christ, both in his own heart, and in the world around him. He cannot but love it, too, when he considers those ties of domestic and social tenderness which connect him with the world, and the dissolving of which seems to tear him from himself. He will naturally think it good for him to be here, when he beholds others dependent on him for support, or for guidance through the world: and he

may say of such beloved objects of interest, as Saint Paul says of his sons in the Gospel,—“to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” But he must check these overflowings of nature, by the thought, that he is also the servant and the friend of a Saviour who desires to welcome him in the mansions of the Father. He must not love this life, so as to have no “desire to depart and to be with Christ.” Whilst he thinks it good to be here, he must ever bear in mind that “to depart” is “far better.” Neither must he disjoin his love for the present life from his love for the future. When he feels reluctant to quit the scene of his sojournment, it must be that he is reluctant to quit a post which his Lord has assigned him—that he takes a hearty interest in those temporal duties in which he is engaged, as one who does all things to the glory of God. Whilst he desires life, he must proceed on the conviction that “to live is Christ,”—that “if he lives in the flesh, this is the fruit of his labour.”—If he thus regards both life and death, he may then

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say with Saint Paul, "What I shall choose, I wot not : for I am in a strait betwixt two : having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better : nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful."

**THE END.**



